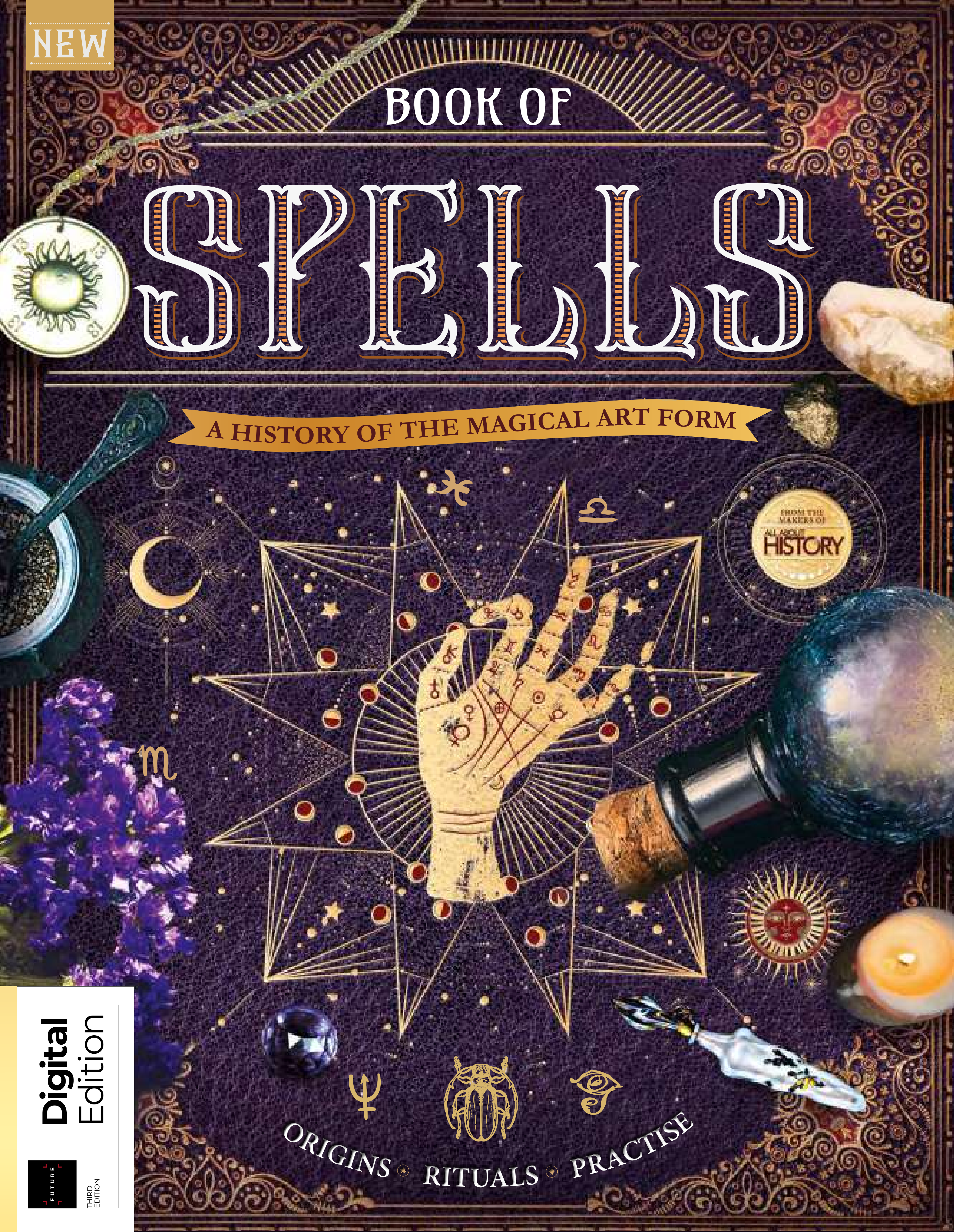
NEW

BOOK OF SPELLS

A HISTORY OF THE MAGICAL ART FORM



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Have you ever wanted to make magic? Spellcraft is a mysterious and mystical art form, but with preparation and dedication, you can learn and experience it. To get started, you need to understand its history, from the beliefs and texts of its earliest practitioners to the magical theory that has grown out of them over centuries of practise. In this Book of Spells, you'll discover some of the world's oldest magical texts and how they were used, learn how to plan and assemble the ingredients you need, explore the figures and festivals that can help to energise your spells, and get started with casting them. We encourage you to take the time to explore the history and theory of magic before diving straight into casting spells. Like everything, the more you know and the more you practise, the better at it you'll be. Spellcraft isn't something that should be rushed. In this book you'll find areas where you can keep a journal of your experiences casting the spells provided, so you can learn more about how they're affected by the day, date, zodiac season, phase of the Moon and more. Your experience of spellcraft is unique to you, and only you can truly divine, and define, what you can achieve with it.

FUTURE

BOOK OF SPELLS

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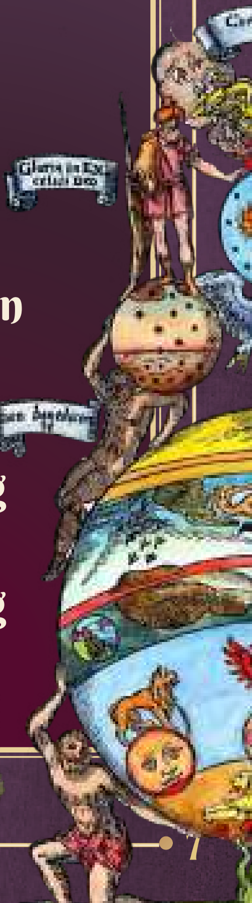

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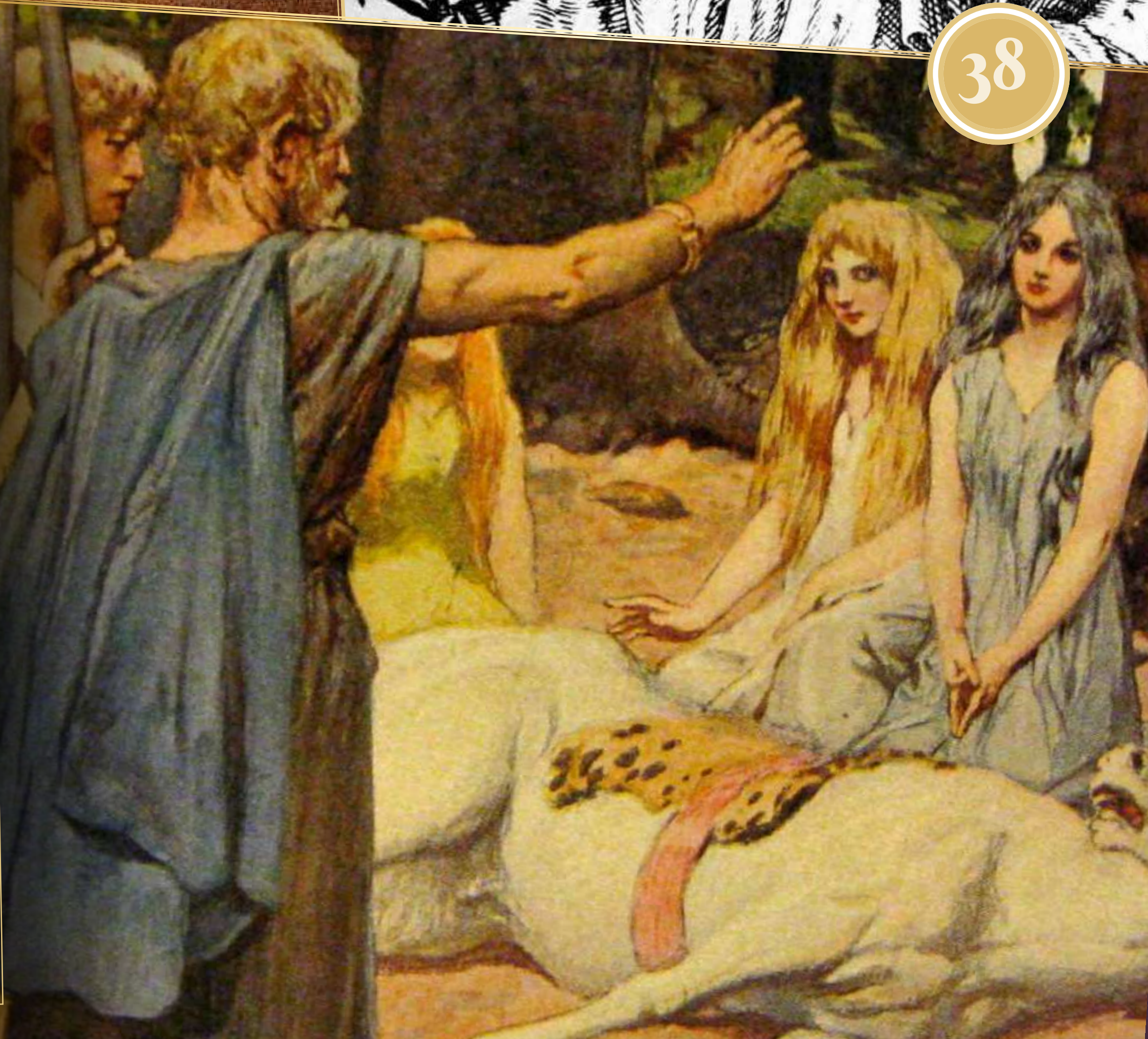

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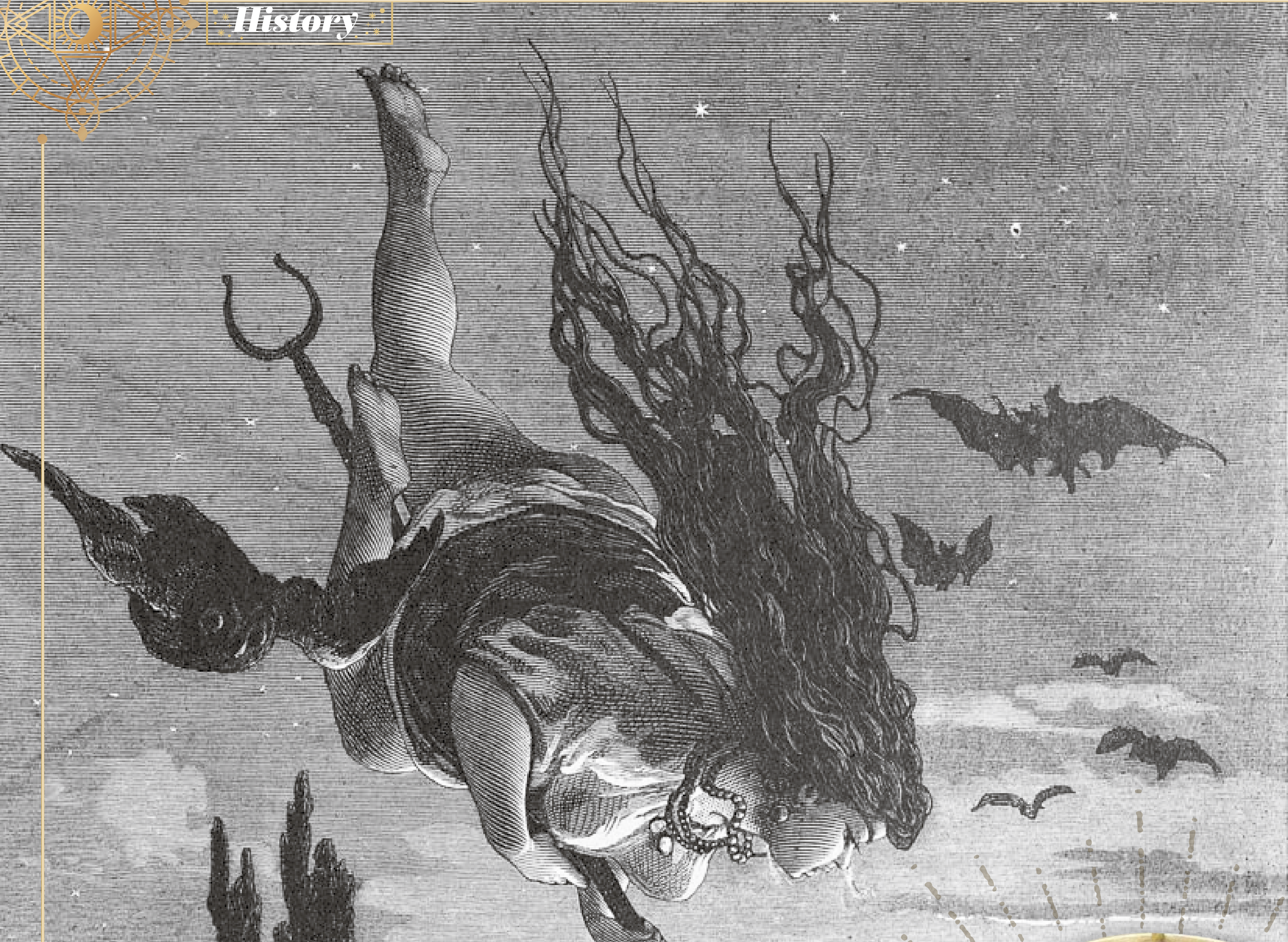


Incantations, charms and spells are most famously used by witches, wizards and fairies to bewitch, curse and grant wishes

In the Middle East, incantation bowls of late antiquity were buried upturned, with spiralling incantations inscribed inside to capture demons, as a form of protective magic

MAGIC WORDS

Incantations come in many forms, and can be used to grant wishes, enact magical transformations, or even seal the fate of rivals

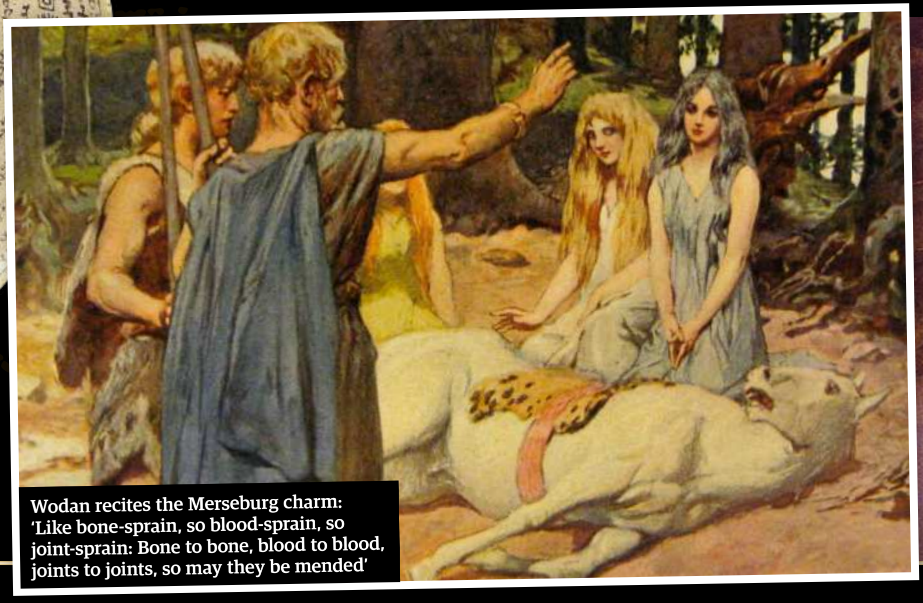
Written by Dee Dee Chainey

Many people believe in the inherent ability of words to influence the world around us, yet not just any words do this: incantations are magical formulae, said with a specific tone and rhyme. The word 'incantation' comes from the Latin incantare, meaning 'to chant or bewitch', also the origin of the word enchant. They usually appear in a specific context that denotes their sacred and magical nature, often as part of a ritual or ceremony. They are spoken verses, songs or chants, used to make the intent of the speaker have a tangible, magical effect in the world - be it on an object, or even a person.

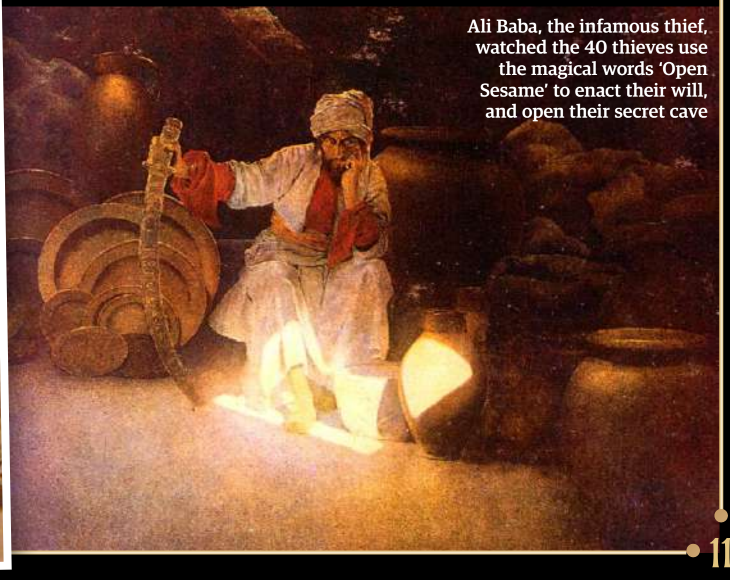
The uttering of the words themselves are a ritual act, and sometimes seen as sacred performance in religious ceremonies throughout the world. The mere act of saying certain words sets the stage for the speaker, and observers, to step outside of the realm of the ordinary, into a magical mindset where they can suspend disbelief and have faith that the words themselves have inherent power. Charms and incantations are not for communication; they are secret - they might be nonsense words, in an unusual language, or sentences recited backwards. Magical words often hold meaning only for those with exclusive, inner knowledge of the ways and customs of the group who use them. They serve to include - and exclude - people at will; they are a thing of power, both in the understanding of them, and the effects they have upon the intended target: stage magicians use the words 'Hocus pocus' to complete their magical acts, while 'Abracadabra' was used by the Romans in the 3rd century CE to rid malaria sufferers of their disease by wearing the word in an amulet.

In folk and fairy tales, incantations often appear as charms and spells. In religious settings they can be mantras - a sacred sound, syllable or word that is often repeated - that help to induce an altered state of consciousness in meditation. Prayer itself can be a form of incantation, often giving glory to a deity or ancestor, thanking them, or asking for help. Christian monks, at one time, recited prayers called loricas for protection. Knights, too, emblazoned these on their shields and armour, reciting them before battle to ensure their safety - the word itself means 'armour' or 'breastplate'. Both the Vikings and Anglo-Saxons used charms for healing. The Merseburg incantations are some of the most famous, with one used to heal the sprained hoof of the Norse god Baldr's wounded horse, and another to escape the bonds of an enemy. In ancient Rome, a carmen verse could be used as a curse to harm an enemy, or a plea to heal a loved one, or to increase wealth, or make crops bountiful.

The *Carmina Gadelica* is a collection of Scottish chants, charms and spells collected in the 19th century



Wodan recites the Merseburg charm: 'Like bone-sprain, so blood-sprain, so joint-sprain: Bone to bone, blood to blood, joints to joints, so may they be mended'



Ali Baba, the infamous thief, watched the 40 thieves use the magical words 'Open Sesame' to enact their will, and open their secret cave

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MAGICAL THINKING

Magic has a long and venerable history that has been entwined with and had an important influence on both religion and science for centuries, and still resonates with people today

Written by April Madden

Magic through the ages

Primal rites
Paleolithic peoples create artwork based around the acknowledgement of prey animals and the ritual propitiation of their ancestors. Some paintings include strange, human-animal hybrids that are later theorised to be shamanistic figures.
Paleolithic era

Defining moment

Pyramid scheme

c. 2686–2181 BCE

The Pyramid Texts, dating from the ancient Egyptian Old Kingdom, are the oldest still-extant magical texts. Primarily related to the ancient Egyptian religion, particularly the cult of Osiris, the god of the afterlife and rebirth, they describe magical processes by which the dead can transform their spirit into an akh, an aspect of the soul that was believed to allow them to assume any form and visit the world of the living. Achieving the state of an akh required certain things: the soul had to be worthy according to the judgement of Maat, goddess of truth, and it needed both a tomb and a preserved body.

Northern sorcery
The peoples of the Late Scandinavian Iron Age are known to practice two forms of magic, seiðr (a form of soothsaying), and galdr (enchantment; singing or speaking spells aloud). Their culture will go on influence huge tracts of northern Europe and Russia.
5th century BCE

Defining moment

It's a kind of magi

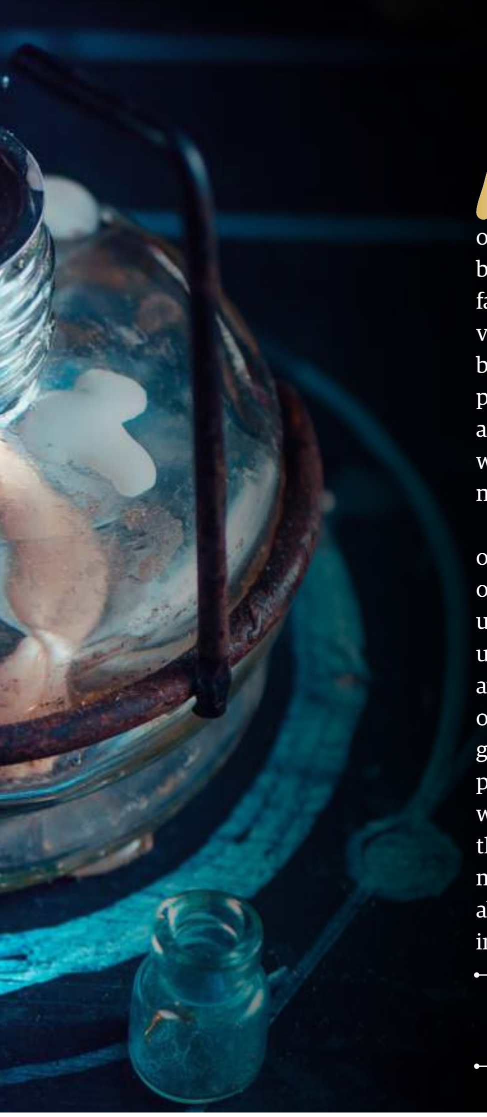
5th century BCE

The Persian Empire's state religion, Zoroastrianism, introduces its priests, the magi, to territories across the Middle East, Mediterranean and parts of India, Africa and China, where this sculpture of a Zoroastrian priest originates (He is wearing a veil to protect the sacred flame of a Zoroastrian fire temple from being profaned by his breath). Politically powerful and credited with the capacity to command weather, interpret dreams and predict the future using astrology, their seemingly uncanny abilities see their name adopted by the ancient Greeks to describe sorcery, giving us the word 'magic' that we still use today.

Druid science
The Celtic cultures of Europe and the British Isles are recorded as having religious leaders known as druids who are lore keepers and lawmakers, political advisors, practitioners of magic, and expert healers. A Greek scholar compared their philosophy to that of Pythagoras.
4th century BCE

The rise of Christianity
The Christian religion dismisses and demonises magic in its earliest written records, starting with the figure of Simon Magus. This doctrine will spread throughout the Christian world and last for centuries.
1st century CE

Cults of the chemists
People in Hellenic Egypt study the properties of metals, minerals and plant extracts as early as the 4th century BCE. They have fully synthesised this with Greek and Egyptian philosophy by the 3rd century CE to create a new way of understanding.
3rd century CE



Many people don't believe in magic. But many people have in the past, and many people do now. Those who don't might dismiss this as silly, pointing out that there is no secret *Harry Potter* world hidden behind the mundane realities of everyday life. But in fact the theory and practice of magic has a long and venerable history, and whether you choose to believe in it or not, without some of its philosophical ideas and technological advances, the rational, scientific world of the 21st century would not be what it is today.

Sociologists often think of magic in relation to two other key ideas that we use to understand the world around us: religion and science. Religion attempts to explain the mysteries of existence through the prism of gods and the regulations that their priests set down for worshippers to follow, while science prefers to address these mysteries through detailed investigation of the immediate material universe, and through informed theorising about those parts of it too inaccessible to be studied in person.

Magic can be thought of as the halfway point between the two, and today's practitioners will tell you that it requires the wholehearted faith of one and the judicious rigour of the other. Certainly many contemporary practitioners of magic are also followers of pagan religions such as Wicca. But for centuries beforehand, magic was also used by a wide range of people of various faiths, or none, in the same way as we use scientific principles today: to make sense of and predict natural phenomena, to understand the nature of plants and animals, to develop medicines and techniques to heal injury and disease, and to create new and beautiful things. But for many people there's still something more to the idea of magic than that, something that still makes it stand out as a separate concept to both religion and science. The controversial occultist Aleister Crowley put it best when he said that magic is "the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will". Crowley's definition of magic is doing things designed to make what you want to happen, happen. This is how people have done so over the centuries.

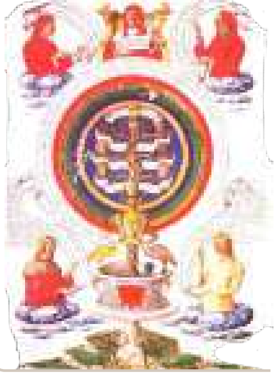
Many of the sciences, like chemistry and astronomy, have their roots in ancient magical ideas

"Magic is the point between science and religion"

Defining moment

Alchemy reaches Europe

12th century



The Graeco-Egyptian system is adopted by Arab scholars, who name it al-kīmiyā'. Introduced to Europe via Muslim Spain, it becomes the province of scientifically inclined churchmen and gentleman-scholars who also study biblically inspired forms of magic. Alchemy's search for the mystical philosopher's stone and its concept of transmuting base metals into precious ones appeals to late medieval and Renaissance society, although it's possible that these concepts are in fact metaphors for the alchemist's personal and spiritual growth. Notable practitioners of alchemy in Europe include John Dee, court magician to Elizabeth I. Alchemical ideas will go on to influence the Occult Revival.

Season of the witch

Mass hysteria about demonic witchcraft grips Europe and the New World. The (predominantly Protestant Christian) witch hunters tend to focus their paranoia on women and lower-class men, particularly those practicing folk medicine in rural areas, rather than on the wealthy and powerful, whose alchemical research will soon become modern science.

1580-c1750

Colonial bias

Western Europe's colonisation of the wider world sees it ride roughshod over entire nations' cultural pre-Christian religious and magical traditions – including its own. These practices are variously suppressed, imperfectly and inaccurately recorded, or dismissed as superstitious curiosities.

17th-18th century

The Occult Revival

Bohemian intellectuals of the late Victorian period develop interests in Spiritualism, the study of pre-Christian religions and psychic power, which leads them to begin exploring the ideas of the alchemists, ancient pagan theology, and the remnants of folk magical traditions.

Late 19th century

Battle magic

Ceremonial magicians such as Dion Fortune, and Wiccans like Gerald Gardner, quietly stage rites to protect Britain against the threat of bombings and invasion from the occult-obsessed Nazi German high command.

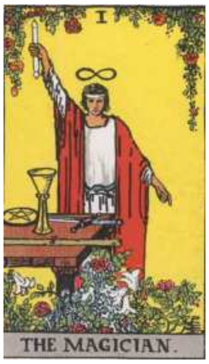
1939-1945

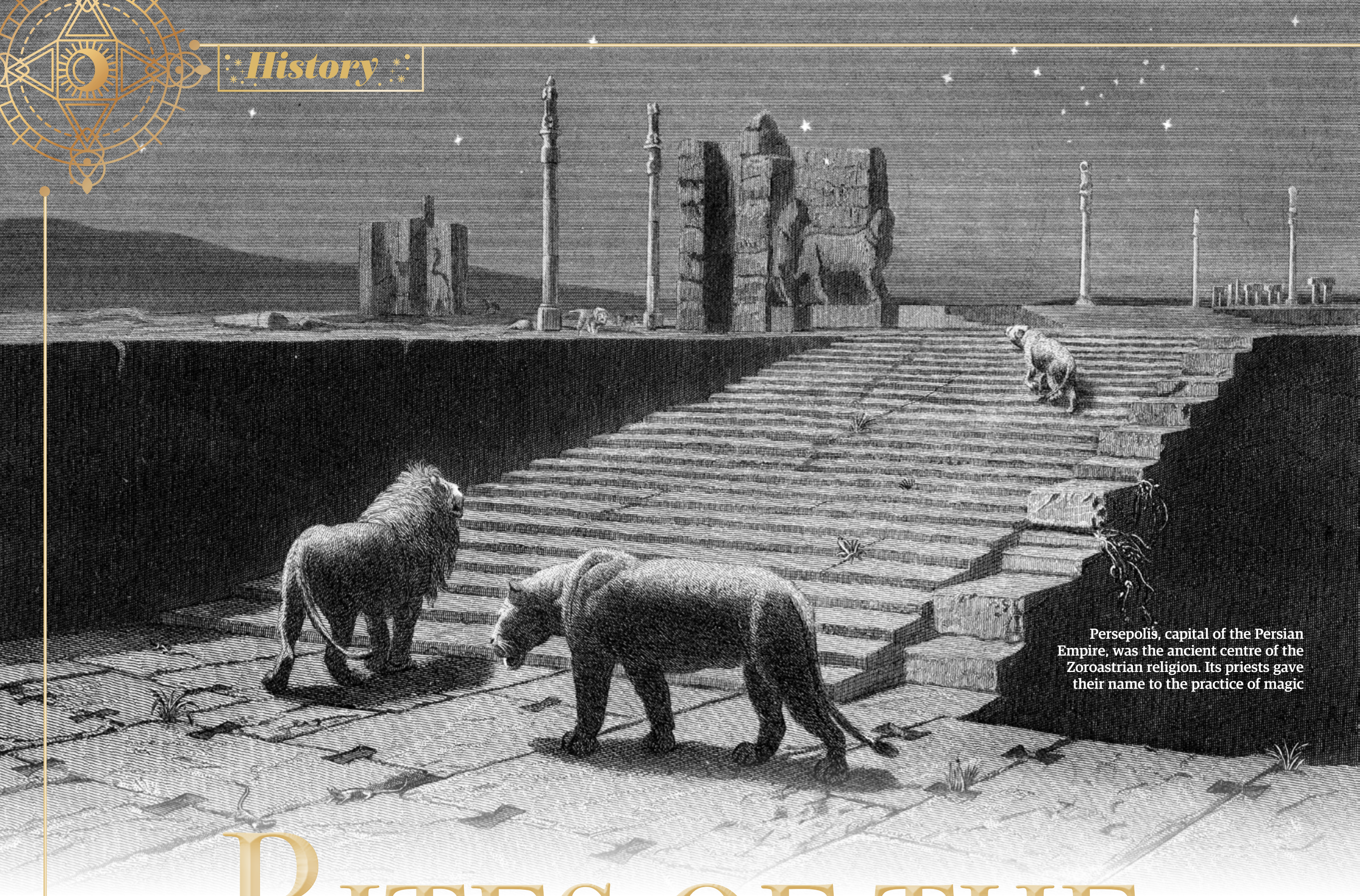
Defining moment

A new age

1950s-present

The repeal of Britain's Witchcraft Act in 1951 paves the way for a new vogue for magical thinking throughout the Western hemisphere. Wicca, with its focus on ritual magic, gains traction, as do other pagan spiritual paths. Tarot reading becomes popular; astrological predictions are published in mainstream newspapers and magazines. Some commentators tie this burgeoning interest in the occult to wider social issues and a need for people to feel in control of their lives; others suggest that the upswing in interest is due to disaffection with traditional religions, or even due to the increasing popularity of fantasy novels, comics, TV and movies.





Persepolis, capital of the Persian Empire, was the ancient centre of the Zoroastrian religion. Its priests gave their name to the practice of magic

RITES OF THE ANCIENT MAGES

The idea of magic grew out of prehistoric cultural practices, before evolving in the cradle of civilisation

Some of the earliest examples of magical thinking can be seen in the art and artefacts left behind by our Paleolithic ancestors. While we don't have written records that explain to us what these ancient people meant thousands of years ago when they created these items, we can infer something of their use and meaning from context.

We know that in the Middle to Upper Paleolithic eras (between 80,000-40,000 years ago), hunter-gatherers improved many of their existing technologies and created new ones. They also began to create art, and this gives us a clue as to what they might have been thinking. Cave paintings of prey animals may show a simple record of what to kill and when, which older hunters would have narrated to younger ones. Or they may show evidence of an animistic belief system, in which the spirit of the prey is trapped in a ritually drawn image before the hunt, enabling hunters to capture and kill it, or in which the group honours the animal's sacrifice after its death by immortalising it in paint. Some sites feature images of strange half-human, half-animal hybrids that hint at an even deeper and more meaningful shamanic relationship with the natural world.

These ancient people also propitiated the spirits of their ancestors with grave offerings, and this gave rise to cultic rituals around death and the afterlife. The greatest example of this is the belief system that came into being in ancient Egypt, and it's here that the oldest known religious texts in the world were discovered. We call the Pyramid Texts religious because they are set firmly within a well-documented theology, but a better adjective might be magical, because it's spells that these texts

> "Herodotus describes the magu calming a storm by using wizard's spells on the wind"

contain. Specifically, the instructions, carved into the inner walls of tombs, contain directions that the dead need to follow to protect their remains and enter the afterlife.

In the ancient world, then, religion and magic were tightly intertwined, and nowhere was this more visible than in Persia. Once the largest empire the world had ever seen, it held sway over lands from Europe to Africa to India, and its language and culture affects theirs even to this day. During its Achaemenid Empire a social class rose that was made up of the priests of Persia's state religion, Zoroastrianism. The priests were called 'magu', a word that derives from the Proto-Indo-European 'magh'. 'Magh' means 'capable of' or 'able to'; a 'maguš', then, is someone who is able to and capable of doing… something.

> Persia's place in the heartland of civilisation antd trade meant its word for magic was adopted throughout the world

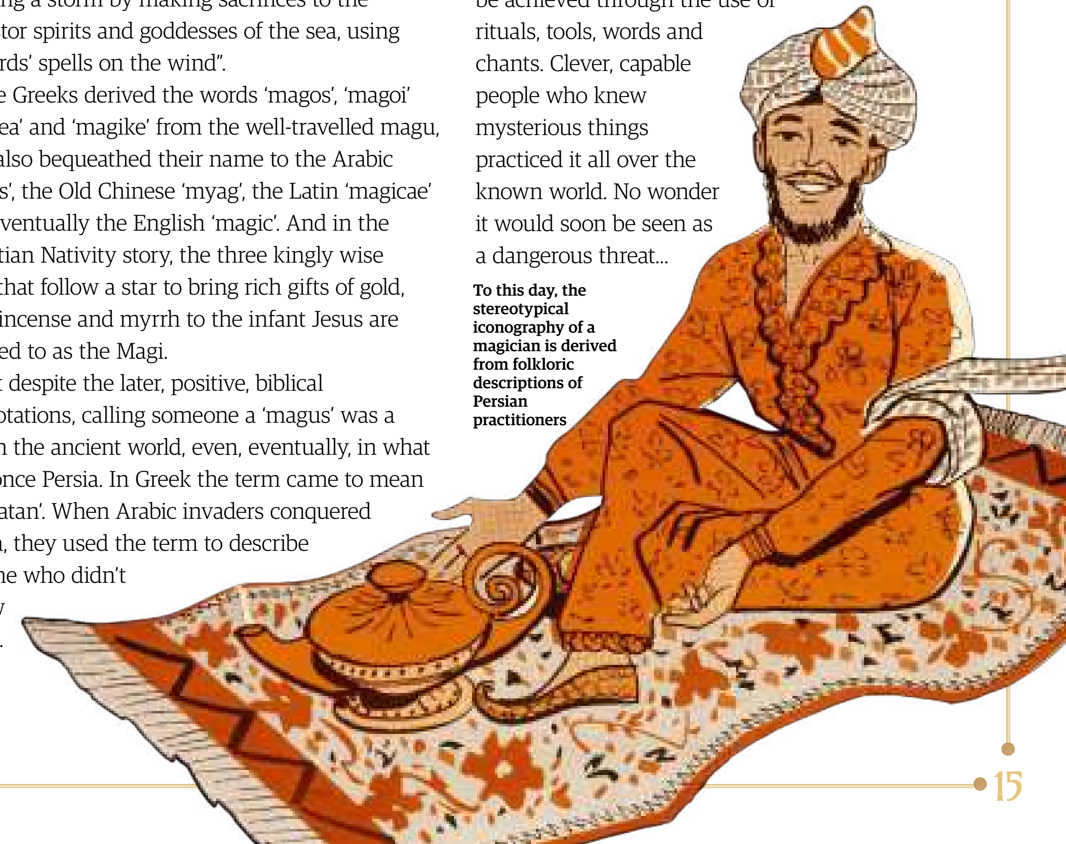
The Greek historian Herodotus described these magu, or magi, as royal advisors, ritual practitioners, and dream interpreters. They studied astronomy and were able to predict eclipses and meteor showers; some of their shrines were fire temples in which a sacred flame always burned, seemingly of its own volition (often thanks to some clever engineering or the presence of a vent of natural gas), and they had a firm grip on Persian royal power and on the hearts and minds of the populace, both of which fuelled their international reputation for the uncanny. In one memorable passage from the seventh book of his *Histories*, Herodotus describes the magu calming a storm by making sacrifices to the ancestor spirits and goddesses of the sea, using "wizards' spells on the wind".

The Greeks derived the words 'magos', 'magoi' 'magiea' and 'magike' from the well-travelled magu, who also bequeathed their name to the Arabic 'majūs', the Old Chinese 'myag', the Latin 'magicae' and eventually the English 'magic'. And in the Christian Nativity story, the three kingly wise men that follow a star to bring rich gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the infant Jesus are referred to as the Magi.

But despite the later, positive, biblical connotations, calling someone a 'magus' was a slur in the ancient world, even, eventually, in what was once Persia. In Greek the term came to mean 'charlatan'. When Arabic invaders conquered Persia, they used the term to describe anyone who didn't follow Islam. In particular they applied it to the warriors from the far north that arrived via Byzantium to trade for silk with them. To the Muslim Arabs, these northerners were unbelievers, pagans and heathens like the defeated Persians and their priesthood, and so they called them by the same name: 'al-Majūs'. Today, we know them as the Vikings.

The Vikings may not have used the word 'magic' themselves but they had a very clear concept of it. Their word for it was 'fjölkyngi' or 'great knowledge', and it was codified into systems. 'Seiðr' or sorcery was practiced by women (And occasionally some men, although they were considered 'ergi' or taboo). The word-root comes from the Proto-Indo-European 'sehi', 'to bind'; these sorceresses carried distaff-like wands that they used to literally spin charms like thread. The metaphysical link of thread with time and fate meant that they were also soothsayers. The second system was called 'galdr', which means 'incantation' and derives from the Proto-Indo-European word for singing. Men and women could practice galdr by vocalising rhythmic spells – literal enchantment. These spells could also be enacted by spelling out the runes of the Norse Futhark script, which was considered magical in and of itself.

By the end of antiquity, then, the concept of magic had already become the stuff of legend. It offered understanding of the elements and stars, knowledge of the past, present and future, even power over life and death, all of which could be achieved through the use of rituals, tools, words and chants. Clever, capable people who knew mysterious things practiced it all over the known world. No wonder it would soon be seen as a dangerous threat…



To this day, the stereotypical iconography of a magician is derived from folkloric descriptions of Persian practitioners

The math magician

Mathematics is, to us, the most rational and reasonable of subjects. So it may surprise you to learn that one of its most important figures, Pythagoras, was in fact considered capable of performing magic. The Ionian Greek mathematician and philosopher was a follower of the Orphic Mysteries, a cult dedicated to Orpheus, the legendary poet and musician thought to be the son of the Muse Calliope. Pythagoras forbade his own followers from eating beans due to their supposed magical connection with the shades of the dead in the underworld, and was alleged to have performed a range of wizardly feats. These included being seen during the same hour in two separate cities, charming a wild white eagle that let him stroke it, being greeted by a river that said "Hail, Pythagoras!" to him, accurately predicting that a dead man would be aboard a ship entering the local harbour, accurately predicting the appearance of a white bear nearby (and that it was dead) before the messenger bearing the news had reached him, and biting a venomous snake to death. These stories link him to Orpheus; both are what the Greeks called 'theios aner' or 'divine men', a term used for (ethnically Greek) performers of magic who were considered socially acceptable, rather than the barbarian magu.

Image source: Getty

Pythagoras, an initiate of the Orphic Mysteries, was considered to have magical powers in addition to his intellectual prowess

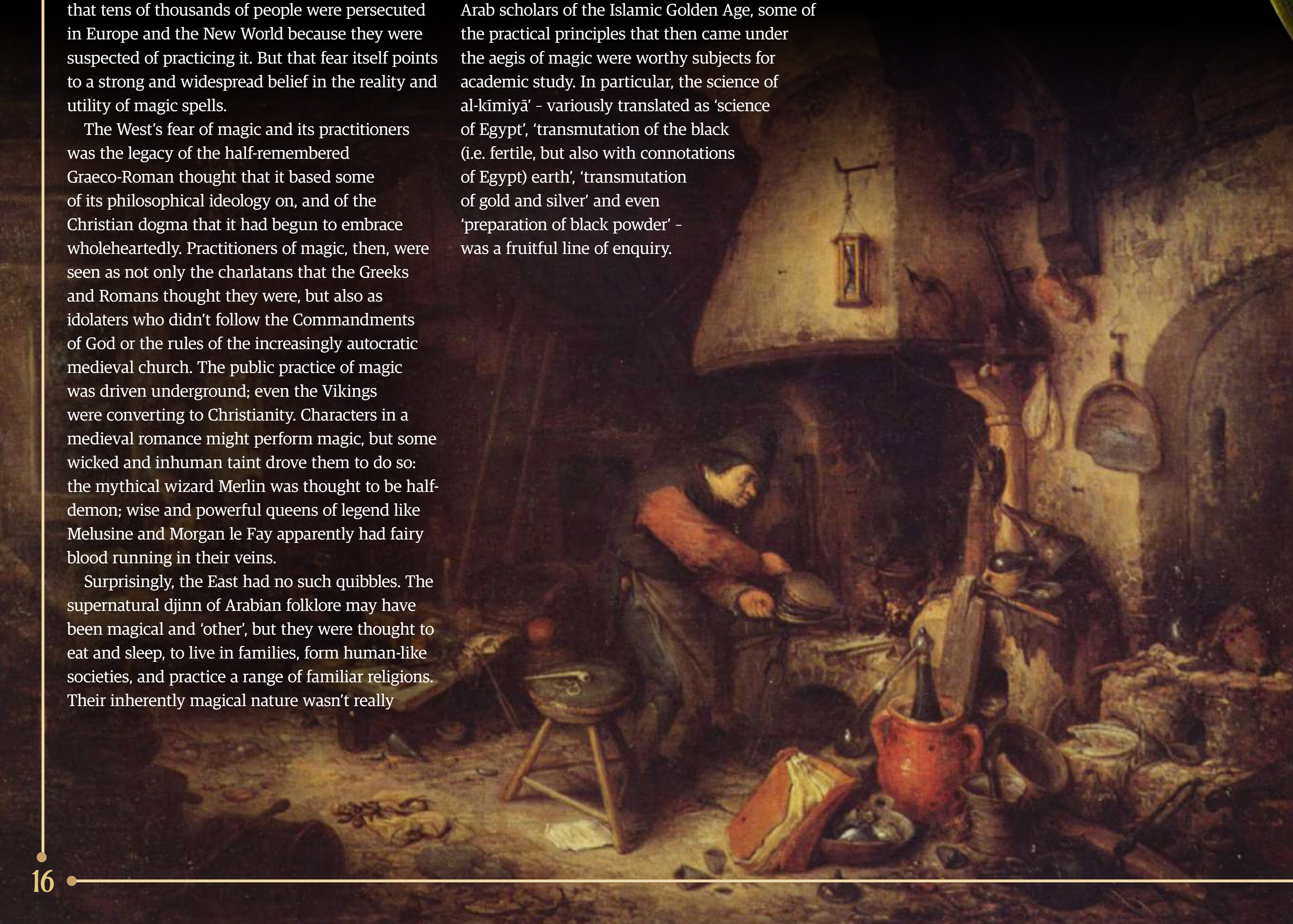
FEAR OF A BLACK MAGIC

Sorcery was viewed with fear and superstition in the medieval West, while Eastern civilisations began to explore its arcane expertise

The time between the classical era and the Age of Reason was a golden age for magic. It seems strange to say this when for much of the medieval and early modern periods it was feared, to the extent that tens of thousands of people were persecuted in Europe and the New World because they were suspected of practicing it. But that fear itself points to a strong and widespread belief in the reality and utility of magic spells.

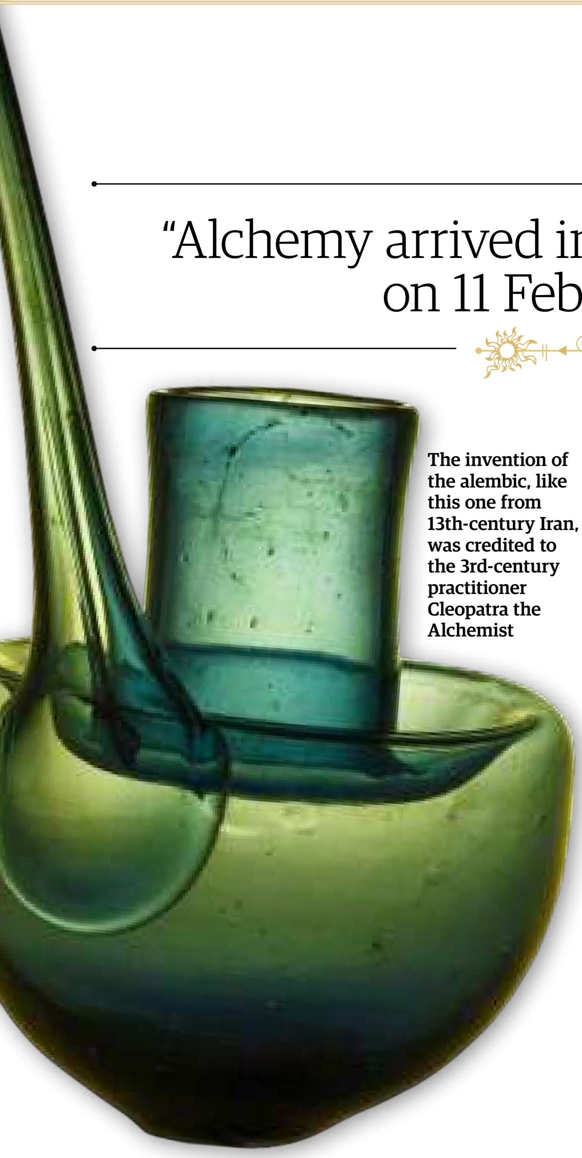
The West's fear of magic and its practitioners was the legacy of the half-remembered Graeco-Roman thought that it based some of its philosophical ideology on, and of the Christian dogma that it had begun to embrace wholeheartedly. Practitioners of magic, then, were seen as not only the charlatans that the Greeks and Romans thought they were, but also as idolaters who didn't follow the Commandments of God or the rules of the increasingly autocratic medieval church. The public practice of magic was driven underground; even the Vikings were converting to Christianity. Characters in a medieval romance might perform magic, but some wicked and inhuman taint drove them to do so: the mythical wizard Merlin was thought to be half-demon; wise and powerful queens of legend like Melusine and Morgan le Fay apparently had fairy blood running in their veins.

Surprisingly, the East had no such quibbles. The supernatural djinn of Arabian folklore may have been magical and 'other', but they were thought to eat and sleep, to live in families, form human-like societies, and practice a range of familiar religions. Their inherently magical nature wasn't really an issue, and despite their apparent appetite for carrion they were no more or less capable of evil than humans. As with any other sentient being, the proper uses of their powers could only be discovered and refined through education. To the Arab scholars of the Islamic Golden Age, some of the practical principles that then came under the aegis of magic were worthy subjects for academic study. In particular, the science of al-kīmiyā' – variously translated as 'science of Egypt', 'transmutation of the black (i.e. fertile, but also with connotations of Egypt) earth', 'transmutation of gold and silver' and even 'preparation of black powder' – was a fruitful line of enquiry.



While medieval Europe feared magic, the Middle East embraced subjects such as alchemy, which finally reached Europe in the 12th century

> “Alchemy arrived in Europe with a bang on 11 February 1144”



The invention of the alembic, like this one from 13th-century Iran, was credited to the 3rd-century practitioner Cleopatra the Alchemist

Alchemy’s earliest roots lie in Hellenistic Egypt in the 4th century BCE, at the crossover point between ancient Egyptian science and spellcraft and the philosophical and technical prowess of the ancient Greeks. Its earliest practitioners, male and female, followed a variety of faiths, including the religions of the book and various pagan theologies. They made dyes and medicines and studied metallurgy and the behaviour of minerals: alchemy has always had a close relationship with science, and the modern science of chemistry derives its name from it. These alchemists lived in a cultural melting pot; the major Greek philosophies of Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Stoicism and Gnosticism were studied and debated by alchemy’s clever, curious, educated practitioners, merging with Egyptian ideas about the god Thoth, thrice-great lord of knowledge, science, philosophy, religion and magic. The Ptolemaic Greeks syncretised Thoth with his Hellenic equivalent, Hermes, through their system of interpretatio Graeca, creating the figure of Hermes Trismegistus, and by the 650s CE, alchemy was less a science for working with chemicals and more a framework for understanding the transformative powers of intent and ritual; a mystical way of probing the secrets of the universe. The theoretical transformations of lead into silver and gold, the power of the philosopher’s stone, were seen as metaphors for personal, spiritual and magical growth. They were the keys to hidden powers, usable only by trained practitioners who followed the proper, encoded formulae. To this day, ‘hermetic’ means ‘tightly closed, inaccessible’. This hermetic alchemy was influential eastwards as far away as India; a parallel variant evolved in China, which was more focused on medicine than metalwork, and gave rise to the invention of gunpowder.

Alchemy arrived in Europe with a bang on 11 February 1144 thanks to one man, an English Arabophile working in the Iberian Peninsula, named Robert of Chester. He translated one book of alchemy; thereafter alchemical texts flooded into Christian Spain from the neighbouring Muslim realm of al-Andalus, were translated into Latin, and made their way north. Highly placed academic theologians began trumpeting the value of rationalism and Aristotelian thought, but in the superstitious Europe of the Middle Ages, little of this sank into the popular consciousness. Famous medieval European practitioners of the scientific side of alchemy included Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas and Roger Bacon. All three were highly placed churchmen, but in the medieval mind they were suspected of being wizards and mages. Bacon was rumoured to have sculpted a head out of bronze that could speak and answer questions put to it.

As the medieval period gave way to the early modern era in Europe, these highly placed practitioners of alchemy were soon differentiated from the common or garden cunning folk that brewed cures and potions, cast love spells and averted curses.

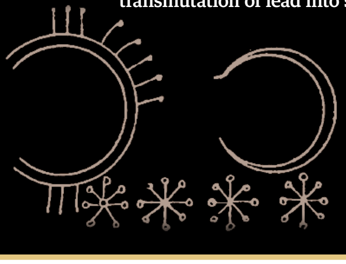
> Many early alchemical texts were lost wthen the Roman Emperor Diocletian ordered them burned in the 3rd century CE

The Witch Hunts of the early modern period would see tens of thousands of people dead, most of whom wouldn’t have had the first idea how to cast a spell, or even how to spell their own name. But for the gentleman-alchemist like John Dee and his successors, magic was now a legitimate line of enquiry in the study of natural philosophy. The Renaissance concept of magia naturalis - natural magic - encompassed alchemy, astrology and herbalism and the sciences that grew from them: chemistry and astronomy and botany. It was the study of the natural world and the force that was thought to animate and influence it, a scholarly and useful quest for knowledge that had nothing in common with the transgressive, demonically inspired witches that hung from the gibbets of Europe and the New World. Those natural magicians who were still trafficking with arcane forces and esoteric powers now did so quietly, behind (hermetically) closed doors. And who in the emerging Age of Reason would believe that they were doing anything at all?

A star of science

The alchemists existed at a crossroads between magic and science, and a fantastic exemplar of this is Cleopatra the Alchemist. Thought to be active in 3rd century CE Alexandria, Macedonian-Egyptian Cleopatra was regarded as one of the earliest recorded practising alchemists and one of only four female alchemists who could produce the philosopher’s stone (although it’s unclear whether this was an actual physical object or a metaphysical idea). She is credited with the invention of the alembic, a distillation device still in use by chemists and alcohol distillers today, and was described by her contemporaries as knowledgeable and erudite. The legendary Ostanes, credited with introducing Egyptian magic to ancient Greece, apparently said to her that: “In thee is concealed a strange and terrible mystery. Enlighten us, casting your light upon the elements”. This is quoted in the *Dialogue of Cleopatra and the Philosophers*, an ancient text that purports to describe an educational meeting, perhaps a symposium, between Cleopatra and several other practitioners of alchemy. Cleopatra also produced a mysterious document called the *Chrysopoeia (‘gold-making’) of Cleopatra*, which consists entirely of diagrams and symbols. Her writings were described as grandiose, metaphorical and allusive, describing alchemical processes in relation to conception, motherhood and nurturing.

This diagram from Cleopatra the Alchemist’s *Chrysopoeia* is thought to symbolise the transmutation of lead into silver



DISENCHANTMENT AND A NEW AGE

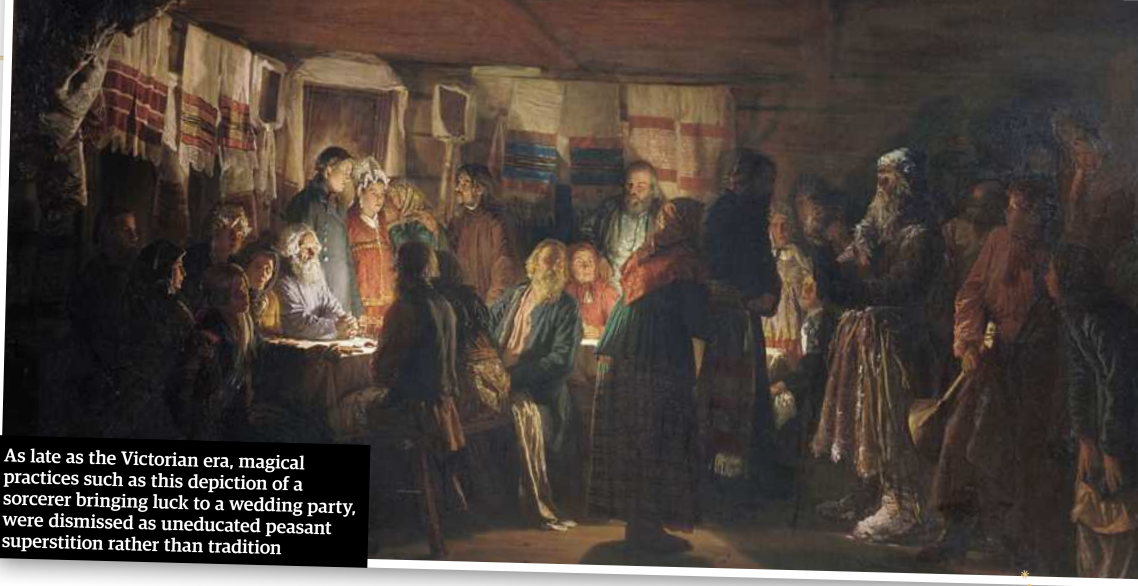
The Age of Reason may have obscured them, but magical traditions were just waiting to be rediscovered

The Age of Reason was closely tied to the Age of Discovery, the colonial era in which Western powers, buoyed by their advanced technology, conquered and commandeered vast tracts of the rest of the world. In these mysterious new territories, notably Africa, European colonists came across indigenous religions and practices. With overwhelming arrogance, the patriarchal European power structure showed no interest in learning about these rites and beliefs, instead syncretising them with the assumptions that had been made about European folk magic in the 16th and 17th centuries. At best, they were seen as foolish anthropological quirks, symbolic of the misguided notion that the conquered peoples were intellectually inferior to and culturally less advanced than their oppressors; at worst they were seen as proof that these people practiced witchcraft, devilment and heresy that should be harshly suppressed by the colonisers for the sake of the natives' souls. Their ancient magic was dismissed as something irrational and non-existent, practiced by old wives, idiots and savages who didn't know any better; Western society believed it spoke to an absence of logic and rationalism that betrayed its practitioners' intellectual, racial or cultural inferiority.

Today, many traditional magical practices have been normalised again and are consulted by a wide range of people

This paternalistic, hubristic attitude did the practices of both European and world magic few favours. Rich and specific traditions from different places were unceremoniously grouped together, labelled as backward and uncivilised superstition, and either deliberately quashed or recorded piecemeal as anthropological curiosities. As a result, the survivals from this era are often broken or incomplete, cultural shards that have been divorced from the nuances of their original meaning. Gaps that were later filled in from other traditions that were all lumped together like this now often smack uncomfortably of cultural appropriation or colonial bias. Yet despite the huge problems with the deliberate disenchantment of the Age of Reason, there were still more open-minded Western practitioners, often heirs to the hermetic traditions, who were prepared to continue exploring both their own magical customs and those of the wider world. It's worth noting however, that not every practitioner was open-minded and accepting. Some of the Esotericists of the Occult Revival sought power rather than understanding

> "In the wake of World War II people were looking for new ways of seeing the world"


As late as the Victorian era, magical practices such as this depiction of a sorcerer bringing luck to a wedding party, were dismissed as uneducated peasant superstition rather than tradition

in their appropriation of traditions from around the world. Some adhered to the narrow-minded racial prejudices that were typical of their time and culture; others went even further and embraced the supremacist ideologies of the new and rising political philosophy of fascism, which had a deep fascination with the occult.

Meanwhile, in the early to mid-20th century, philosophies that distrusted religion, such as communism, secularism and humanism, found magic a useful stick to beat it with. Glossing over the debt that science owes to the some of the early concepts of magic, like alchemy - while claiming at the same time to promote scientific rationalism - commentators like HL Mencken used comparisons with the 'outdated' concepts of magic to satirise and mock key religious ideas like holiness, prayer and miracles in an attempt to place religion on the same 'uncivilised', 'irrational' conceptual level as so-called primitive folk traditions. At a time when conventional religious institutions were seeing a downswing in popularity, it was the perfect insult to level at the Western faiths that had traditionally distrusted and even persecuted practitioners of magic - the idea that they were just as wrong.

But magic wasn't going to stay down forever. The Esoteric traditions may have appealed to a certain middle class demographic in the early 20th century, but in the wake of World War II a much broader range of people were looking around for new ways of seeing the world and taking control of their lives. The old Establishment institutions of church, state and academia were seen as either fading in the face of increased secularity, or complicit in the capitalist grab for resources and power that was seen as the root of the early to mid 20th century's global conflicts. As early as the 1950s, with the repeal of Britain's last Witchcraft Act in 1951, practitioners of what they claimed were ancient pagan religions were publicising their magical traditions. Gerald Gardner and Alex Sanders were at the forefront of the creation of Wicca, but this was far from the only magical tradition that emerged as the counter-culture movements of the New Age began to find a foothold in the 20th and 21st century psyche.

The term 'New Age' is in itself problematic. Many followers of today's pagan religions - who make up the majority of what we think of as today's main practitioners of magic - prefer to think of their faiths as directly linked to a long heritage of ancient traditions. They are followers, they argue, not of a New Age, but an Old Religion. Debate rages between practitioners and scholars as to whether the practical lineages of these faiths can be considered to be unbroken or whether they have been rebuilt out of the dismissive or well-meaning anthropological texts of the 19th century, the secretive hermetic knowledge of the Esotericists, or plain old wishful thinking. Others raise concerns about an umbrella term that attempts to encompass a range of disparate practices, from Spiritualism to angel-channelling to UFOlogy to occultism. Many of the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s that evinced an interest in magic embraced syncretism and adopted magical or spiritual traditions from Native Americans, Africans and other previously oppressed peoples. They may have aimed for a holistic and fraternal synthesis of traditions, but can now face accusations of cultural appropriation from the groups that they were attempting to emulate or embrace. Meanwhile, adherents of scientific rationalism or fundamental faiths still find in magic something to mock or to fear, and certainly to try and marginalise or proscribe.

> Magic's continued appeal speaks to people's desire to take control of their lives and find new and deeper meanings in them

Yet in a world in which an entire generation was raised on the everyday sorcery of *Harry Potter*, it's unsurprising that, despite its sometimes-problematic recent social history, magic still flourishes. In an age when many people are disaffected with the current socio-political climate, Aleister Crowley's idea that change can be effected by the power of the will is a beguiling one. Many people find themselves drawn to the idea of taking more control over their lives. Some just like the imagery: stores are full of clothes and accessories bedecked with occult and arcane symbols; tarot readers and astrologers are consulted by an ever-widening range of people. Today, magic is a common trope in books, movies, TV, videogames, even pop music. It may be centuries old, but magic is showing no signs of going away.

Sage: syncretism or stealing?

Many of today's magical, New Age and Mind Body Spirit-focused traditions encourage the use of sage 'smudge sticks' to purify a home, a gathering of people, or a ritual space. Sage is widely considered to be a cleansing herb and is used in traditional herbal medicine in a variety of cultures. Most new practitioners who adopt this use for it - burning bundles of sage like incense - are introduced to the practice through guidebooks or websites related to the tradition that they're interested in; many people who are interested in witchcraft began using it this way. But this use of sage is particular to some Indigenous and Native American tribes and was only adopted by other magical traditions in the US in the 1960s. Not only is this not made clear to those who are introduced to the practice via some neopagan or New Age sources, for some Indigenous practitioners it's a very specific and sacred rite that differs from tribe to tribe and ceremony to ceremony. Some have rules about who can perform the rite, and when, and where, in much the same way every other religion has certain activities that can only be performed by priests, sometimes only priests of a certain level. For these people, the imitation of their rituals by others can be considered to be cultural appropriation.

White sage is a sacred plant in some Indigenous and Native American traditions, but its wider use by other magical practitioners is controversial

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VARIETIES OF MAGIC

Within the world of magic we find many types of mystical practices, each with their own histories and powers

Written by Ben Gazur

For some, the world is nothing but atoms and energy working mechanistically to produce all we see around us, but for others there is another layer of reality. For them the universe is imbued with magic - a magic that permeates everything and can be used by those with the right, often esoteric, knowledge.

Perhaps appropriately for a subject that falls beyond the realm of the normal there is no simple definition of magic. If we describe magic as a set of practices that use supernatural powers to influence events then most religions and prayer would fall within the sphere of magic. That people would feel uncomfortable with describing religion as magic reveals the deep uneasiness with which magic has always been viewed. Magic is often the recourse of those without power, those outside of society, and those the mainstream would call 'the other.' Excluding religion brings its own problems though, as it ignores how often magic appears within religious traditions and texts.

If we do accept a broad definition of magic that excludes religion then we do not approach anything even close to uniformity. Magic comes in many forms. This should not be a surprise, as magic in one form or other has been around as far back in history as we can look and in all cultures. As a magical tradition evolves, it changes to fit the needs of the time and place it exists in. Despite the mutable nature of magic, it is possible to map three broad categories into which most aspects of it can be fitted: ceremonial, natural and shamanistic.

Ceremonial magic is the ritualistic form of magic that many people are familiar with from films and books dealing with the occult. Practitioners of ceremonial magic flourished in the Renaissance when books appeared describing the complex rites required to summon demons, foresee the future and perform any number of amazing feats.

Natural magic focuses on the hidden properties of the universe. Users of natural magic do not seek to create their own powers, but merely to exploit the magic that is inherent in the world. Astrologers did not want to control the heavens, only learn from them. Natural magic required only the knowledge of its existence to use it.

Shamanism links a wide range of beliefs and practices. Typically, shamans have access to other planes of existence and exert influence through spirits. By channelling these spirit forces, shamans can alter the physical world. As we shall see, the world of magic is not a unified one, but a many-layered universe of deeply personal experiences.

Sympathetic magic

Sir James Frazer, author of *The Golden Bough*, described sympathetic magic as "like produces like". At its heart, this branch of magic uses representation to produce an effect.

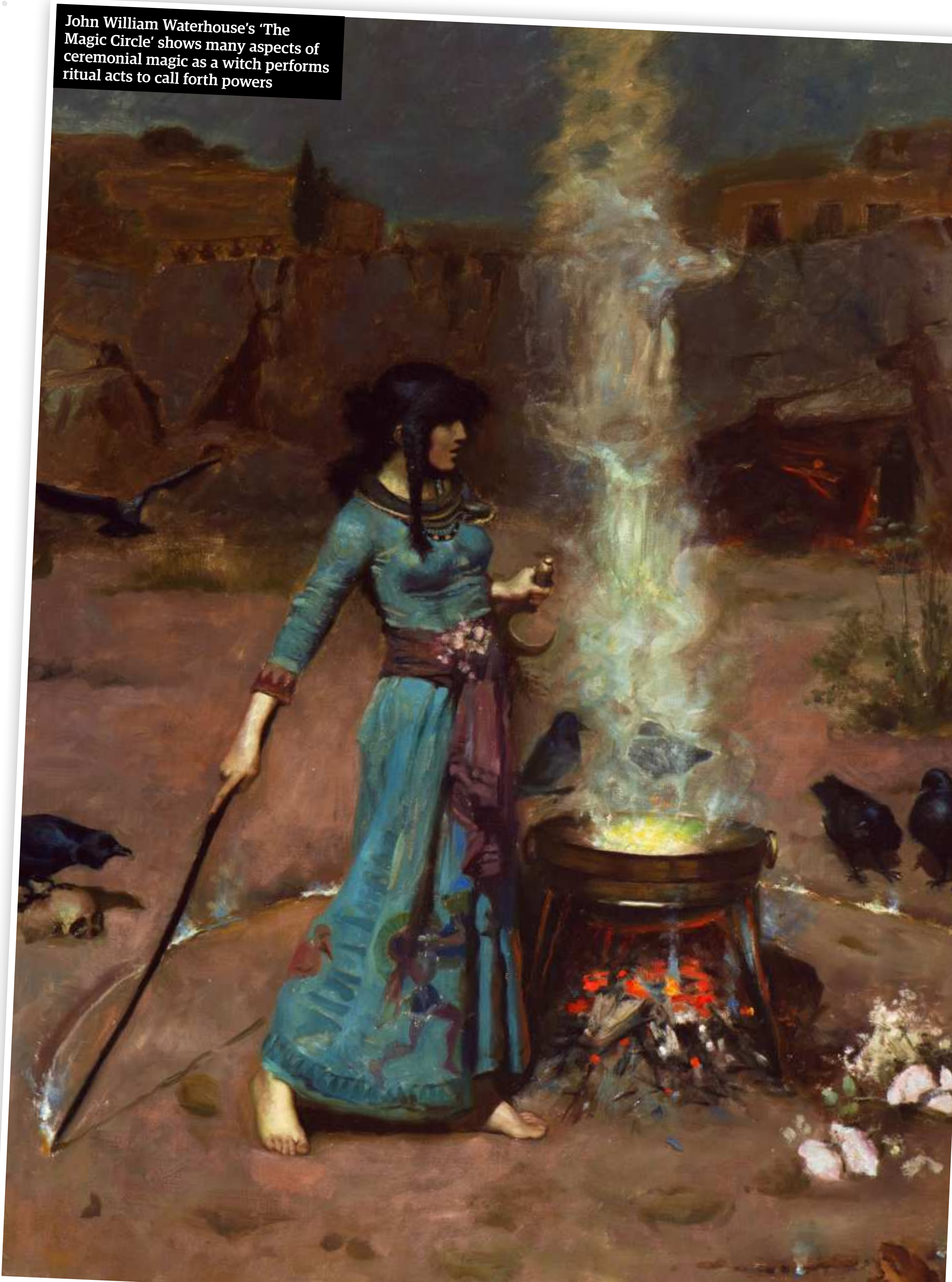
In imitative sympathetic magic, a representation of a person or object is created and subjected to the change the magic user wishes to bring about in them. The best-known version of this is the voodoo doll used to harm someone at a distance. A needle placed in the doll will produce pain in the target. A wax figure of a person may be created and then melted away with the desire to see the person wither.

The other part of sympathetic magic is the idea of correspondence. In herbalism, if a plant resembles some part of the body then it may well be efficacious in curing ailments. The distinct similarity of a walnut to a brain meant that it was used to cure brain diseases, while any phallic-shaped root vegetable could be used to charm away impotence.

Sometimes an object can be used to represent a person too. Having a person's possession, or body part such as nail clippings, allowed magic to be targeted at the person.

CEREMONIAL MAGIC

If you think magic is just chants and spells and hocus-pocus rites, then you are thinking of ceremonial magic



John William Waterhouse's 'The Magic Circle' shows many aspects of ceremonial magic as a witch performs ritual acts to call forth powers

Ceremonial magic is the most familiar type of magic to those in the West. Practitioners use rituals and invocations to tap into uncanny powers. Some believed they were contacting spirits to do their bidding, while others thought that their ceremonial magic was a sort of language that allowed them to command the universe.

The origins of ceremonial magic may be written deep into our nature. Even animals can create their own simple rituals. When given treats at the same time each day, an animal may repeat whatever actions they had been performing just before the first snack fell. Though all the following feedings would happen whatever the animals did, the animals act as if their behaviour was the cause. One pigeon in an experiment always made clockwise turns in the run-up to feeding. All animals, humans included, probably have a tendency to see causal connections where none exist, and so ritual can form a powerful hold over our minds.

In many early religions, ritual was the key part of worship. For the Greeks and Romans it was the proper performance that mattered and not a person's personal relationship with the god. This meant ceremonies had to be flawless in execution – a mumbled word or slip of the tongue meant the whole ritual had to be done again. Pity poor Emperor Claudius with his stammer.

As well as the use of ceremony in ancient religion, there were folk magic practices that relied on ritual acts. In springs and wells across the Roman Empire, rolled-up pieces of lead have been discovered with curses scrawled on them. One curse tablet from London reads, "I curse Tretia Maria and her life and mind and memory and liver and lungs mixed up together, and her words, thoughts and memory."

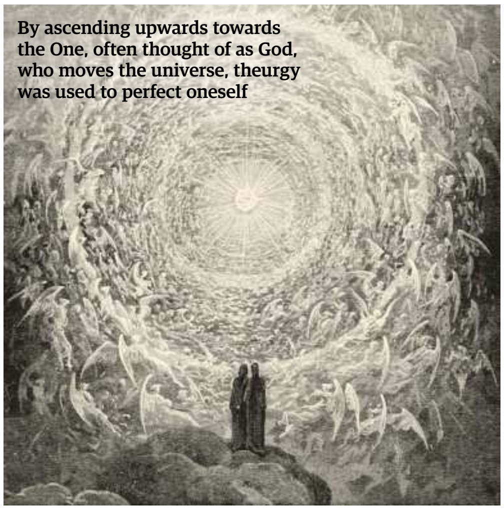
It is from classical sources that ceremonial magic developed. In the Renaissance, everything from the ancient world was suddenly in vogue.

Theurgy: Unity with God

Theurgy ('Divine working') is the magical art of calling forth deities. It was thought by practitioners that by undergoing henosis – unification with the divine – they could achieve perfection. Theurgy is different from prayer in that users are not asking gods to perform acts for them; rather they are seeking to bring some aspect of the divine into their own soul.

The practice of theurgy derived from the beliefs of Neo-Platonist philosophers who taught that the world of physical objects was illusory. Behind all things there was a deeper spiritual realm, and beyond that there was the One, often identified as God. For the Neo-Platonist, unification with God was made possible by meditation and purification, but also through ritual. Iamblichus described how items could be used to bring one closer to the gods because all physical things were created in the likeness of divine images and were imbued with the power of the gods.

Some Christian sects also found use for theurgy. By seeking within themselves access to the divine, some early Christians believed they would be able to see the true nature of reality. In later magical traditions, talismans were used to give magicians unification with gods, to give the magic user superhuman powers, and to increase the potency of their spells.



By ascending upwards towards the One, often thought of as God, who moves the universe, theurgy was used to perfect oneself

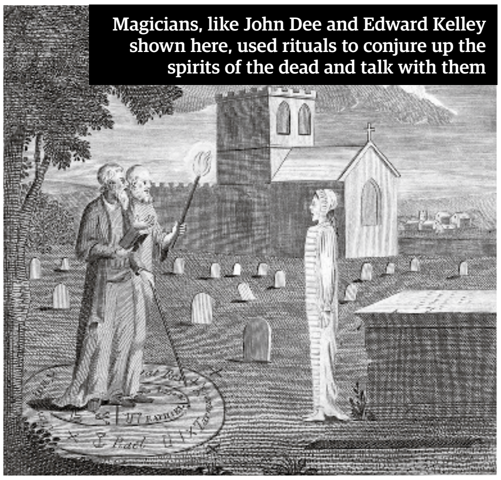
Documents in ancient Greek that had been lost to Europe started reappearing, and offered their owners insights into vanished wisdom. In 15th century Florence, Marsilio Ficino was tasked with translating the works of Plato into Latin, but when mystical texts began appearing he delayed his philosophical work to translate those instead. This *Corpus Hermeneticum*, as the texts were called, was thought to be the work of one Hermes Trismegistus, purported to have been a contemporary of Moses.

In fact, modern scholarship dates many of the works of Hermes Trismegistus to the 2nd century CE. Whoever this Hermes was, his works exploded into European thought. Ceremonial magic became one of the passions of the age - at least among the educated. Court magicians soon became all the rage as well. By linking Hermes Trismegistus with Moses, it was also possible to avoid at least some of the opprobrium heaped on magic by the Church. Siena Cathedral even has a floor mosaic showing Hermes Trismegistus with his teachings.

From the *Hermeneticum* and other mystical sources, such as Kabbalah, developed a range of rituals created by those studying magic. In Kabbalah words, letters, and numbers all took on distinct meanings. Texts could be searched for obscure significances, which would be fed back into ceremonies. Many of the most learned people of the time devoted themselves to finding the proper ritual to gain them the power they sought. It was thought that by searching for hidden meanings in words, you could eventually come to know the mind of the Creator.

Ceremonial magic is found in a range of Esoteric traditions, but also had an influence on the practice of Wicca

Other acts of ceremonial magic were viewed as less innocent than the close reading of books. Some magicians tried to call up demons, converse with angels, and even unify themselves with God using the secret spells and commands they thought they had found in their readings of holy texts. The Church found many practitioners of these arts guilty of heresy, and the spread of ceremonial magic might have fed into the paranoia that fuelled the Witch Hunts that would haunt the Western world for centuries. It may have been acceptable for men like John Dee, with the protection of Queen Elizabeth I, to scry in mirrors and summon angels for knowledge, but those without patronage risked trials and execution.



Magicians, like John Dee and Edward Kelley shown here, used rituals to conjure up the spirits of the dead and talk with them

Renaissance magic died out relatively quickly. Men like Paracelsus straddled two worlds as both magician and modern doctor. The failure of alchemists to make gold or of magicians to summon up armies of demons with their complex rituals meant that fewer monarchs were willing to support their endeavours. James I may have feared magical attack by witches, but his sons and grandsons had more pressing political matters to attend to. With the rise of modern science, people began to turn away from the promises of magic, as verifiable data seemed a more promising way to get results.

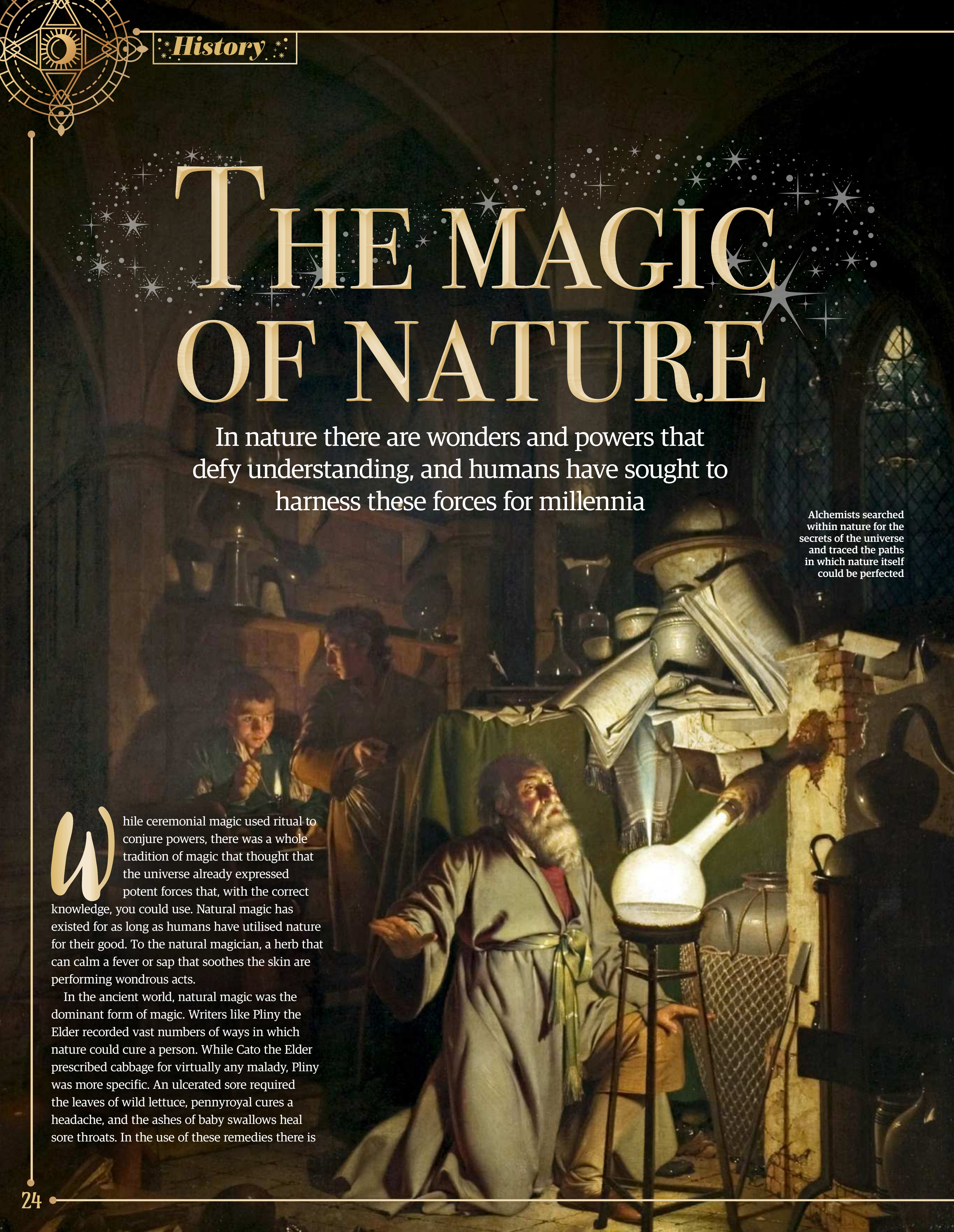
Yet ceremonial magic was not eradicated by science. The revival of using rituals to call on unnatural powers began in the 19th century. Spiritualism used the ceremony of darkened rooms and trances to call out to the dead. Societies like the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn offered to teach members the most efficient rituals to reach their goals. It was Aleister Crowley who codified many of the tools used by modern magic users. Wicca and Thelema followers can be found around the world today. Clearly people are seeking paths science is unable to set for them. Ceremonial magic has been and always will be popular because it places in users' hands powers that the uninitiated will never understand.

Perhaps there is more yet to be discovered about ceremonial magic, for users were often coy about it. As Dion Fortune said of ceremonial magic, "Secrecy concerning practical formulae of ceremonial magic is also advisable, for if they are used indiscriminately, the virtue goes out of them."

"By searching for hidden meanings in words, you could know the mind of the Creator"

THE MAGIC OF NATURE

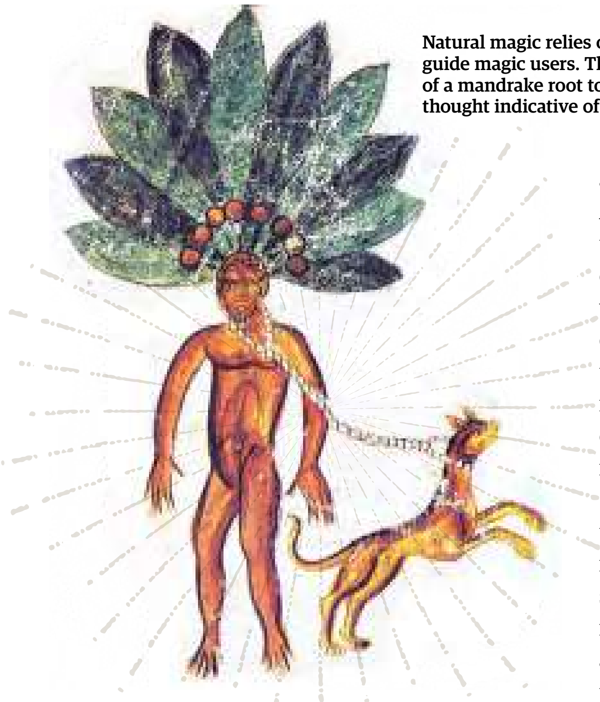
In nature there are wonders and powers that defy understanding, and humans have sought to harness these forces for millennia



Alchemists searched within nature for the secrets of the universe and traced the paths in which nature itself could be perfected

While ceremonial magic used ritual to conjure powers, there was a whole tradition of magic that thought that the universe already expressed potent forces that, with the correct knowledge, you could use. Natural magic has existed for as long as humans have utilised nature for their good. To the natural magician, a herb that can calm a fever or sap that soothes the skin are performing wondrous acts.

In the ancient world, natural magic was the dominant form of magic. Writers like Pliny the Elder recorded vast numbers of ways in which nature could cure a person. While Cato the Elder prescribed cabbage for virtually any malady, Pliny was more specific. An ulcerated sore required the leaves of wild lettuce, pennyroyal cures a headache, and the ashes of baby swallows heal sore throats. In the use of these remedies there is



Natural magic relies on nature to guide magic users. The resemblance of a mandrake root to a man was thought indicative of its powers

no need for prayer or spell-casting. The virtue of the medicines is inherent in their nature; that is natural magic.

Pliny the Elder also gives clues for how natural magic would develop over the millennia. In his chapter on honey he mentions a special summer honey. This is made in the 30 days after the solstice, when Sirius is at its most brilliant in the sky. This honey, Pliny declares, is a gift from the gods, and not much less powerful than the gods' own nectar in healing. Here we see how nature's magic can be far more complex than human ritual. Summer honey is not concerned with any hand-waving or chanting of mere mortals; it is the product of the turning of the heavens above and the divinities that dwell there.

In the Christian era, natural magic would become the acceptable face of magic. Many Christians believed that in creating the universe, God had forged a Great Chain of Being - everything was linked to both higher and lower forms in nature. Natural magicians simply had to find what the relationships were between things to use them as God intended. This often took the form of correspondences (see p70), which God had left clues to in His design for nature.

Yet while there were highly educated people searching for hints in nature for occult cures, there was another tradition that remained relatively hidden. Folk wisdom was often rooted in natural magic. For people who spent all day in the woods and fields, the natural world was far more tied to their daily existence than it is today. Cunning folk, men and women skilled in the use of herbs, could draw on the inherited wisdom of generations. Some cures were no more than hopeful guesses (it is unlikely that touching a dead man's tooth cured toothache), but others, like using willow bark to bring down fevers, led to the discovery of aspirin.

Alchemy was the favoured type of natural-magical act for those seeking wealth. The aim of alchemy was to transform base matter into gold. As well as offering a potentially profitable result, the process was filled with the mystic implication of perfecting the world by using qualities already within materials. The alchemist studied and experimented for years to achieve his goal. Their techniques of distillation, fermentation and rectification paved the way for the wisdom of this type of magic to be transformed into modern chemistry.

While ceremonial magic mostly gave way to science, it is interesting to note that natural magic was in many ways the source of modern science. Many types of divination fall into the realm of ceremonial magic, as they rely on various accoutrements and the invocation of spells to let the user peer into the future. But there are many that depend on nothing more than the observation of nature, and from these observations many scientific advances were derived. Astrologers, by the nature of their art, spent long periods staring at the night sky. By making careful note of the positions of stars for their charts they left records of comets and other phenomena that later astronomers would bring within the realm of science. It was astrologers in ancient Egypt who revealed the length of the year by studying the position of the stars as the heavens rotated.

It is easy to see how herbalism became botany. If you wished to use a plant as a cure then you needed to have been skilled at identifying it. From the folk remedies that the majority of people relied on grew modern medicine. It is easy to scoff at some of the concoctions found in ancient texts, but occasionally they do prove effective. In 2015, a 9th century Anglo-Saxon recipe for an eye salve made from garlic, onion, wine, and cow bile was found to kill MRSA bacteria resistant to the most powerful antibiotics.

It is not just plants that natural magic uses. Anything can have a resonance that gives it power over other aspects of the universe. Crystal healing can feel very modern, but in fact the study of the healing properties of stones goes back millennia. Pliny thought wearing amber was a cure for delirium, for instance. Today, practitioners can consult textbooks to determine what the correct crystals to be placed on a person to cure almost any ailment are, though scientists have yet to find any benefit from this type of natural magic.

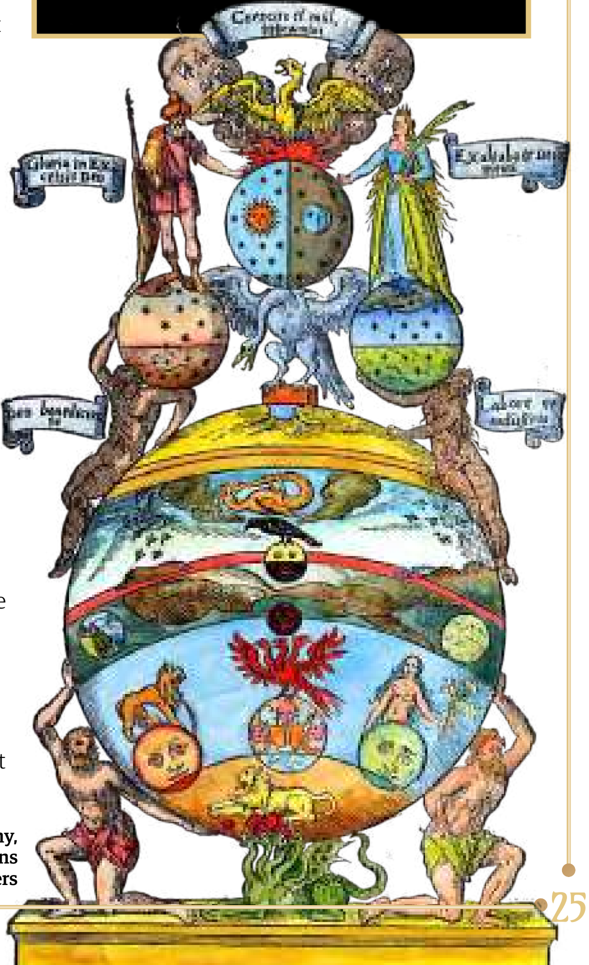
Even today, the sense of wonder in nature we experience can make it feel as if the whole universe is filled with magic. In the ancient world, many believed that rivers, seas and trees were home to spirits of nature. The whole world was alive. So the worship of nature and calling on their powers could stray from pure observation of nature to what would later become recognised as shamanism.

Correspondences: The signature of God

Natural magic relies heavily on correspondences – the belief that there is a mystical link between certain plants and stones and other concepts. Some of these rely on the doctrine of signatures, which Paracelsus taught meant 'Nature marks each growth… according to its curative benefit.' Later believers thought that God had made certain plants resemble the human body parts that they would be able to heal. For instance, the plant eyebright, with its flowers like gleaming eyes, was thought to cure all manner of eye problems.

Other correspondences are less obvious. Numbers, colours and metals can all have specific meanings in magic. Huge tables of correspondences have been constructed to inform magic users how natural objects and concepts can be related to human affairs. One such table online, under the heading 'Purification', links together juniper, amethyst, the colour white and the scent of myrrh. Someone wishing to promote purification therefore might want to incorporate some or all of these in their rite.

The idea of interconnectedness between nature and humanity is one familiar from many branches of mysticism and philosophy. One of the key concepts in Hermeticism is 'As above, so below'. By dealing with these things here below, therefore, we may influence higher powers.



The natural world can be viewed as a hierarchy, and natural magic exploits the connections between higher and lower orders

Shamanism is widely practised today. Here, a Mongolian shaman wears the traditional garb and holds the drum important to many shamanistic rituals

SHAMANISM

Shamans – those with the power to contact spirits – come in many types and offer many routes to spiritual realms

Shamanism has been called the 'technique of ecstasy', and is the magical art of leaving the human realm and entering a spirit world. Every facet of nature is filled with spirits. Only via training and often harrowing experiences does the shaman gain access to this other universe.

Shamanism is not a single faith, rather a tradition that can be found worldwide. Shamanism is practised by the Dukun healers of Indonesia, the Noaidi of the Sami people, the Ayahuasqueros of Peru, and in hundreds of other cultures. Linking them together is the belief that they can access a place beyond the one our normal senses can understand by using an altered state of consciousness.

The training of a shaman can take many years. In some cultures, a shaman must be called by a dream or messenger from the gods, while in others it is a social position that can be inherited. While much may be taught to a trainee shaman by their teachers, generally the final stage of initiation requires a shaman to undergo a shattering physical or psychical experience. The initiate may have to climb mountains, forgo sleep, or imbibe hallucinogens, but the end result is that they pass into the spirit world.

Altered states of mind

As part of a shaman's attempts to enter the spirit world, they may dance for hours, chant, take psychoactive substances or starve themselves. These often-tortuous rites have only one goal – to change how the shaman perceives reality.

The shamanic trance is a necessary step for shamans, as it frees them from concerns with this world and allows them to communicate with higher spirits. Altered states of consciousness can occur in various ways. Many people will have experienced meditation or the feeling of creative flow when our consciousness changes. Shamans use ritual and technique to achieve an altered state at will.

The rhythmic beating of a drum along with repetitive motions is one of the most common techniques. Shamanic drums are often beaten at 4-5 beats per second, which some researchers link to theta waves in the brain. As well as music, dancing to the point of exhaustion is another way to achieve an altered state. The Urarina people of the Peruvian Amazon use ayahuasca to make a hallucinogenic drink.

The altered state that is desired by shamans can defy explanation. Most descriptions talk of changes in time perception, body image, and emotion. But the most common of all is that it is mystical and beyond words.

One of the most commonly found tools in shamanism is the drum, the beating of which may facilitate changes in consciousness

Once the shaman has passed the tests set for them, they often become focal points for a community. With their privileged access to the spirits that transcend normal human life, shamans are expected to perform services for their society. Exactly what is expected of a shaman varies greatly between cultures.

In Korean shamanism, they must pass through hinbyeong ('divine illness') before they can practise. To achieve this, the shaman must be taken over by a god or spirit, an experience that involves bodily pain and mental trauma. Once healed by fully joining with the spirit, the shaman is then qualified to perform rituals on behalf of their community. These most often involve dance and singing to bring divine assistance to humans in matters like harvests and health.

For some Native Americans, the shamans of their tribes offered ways to counter European settlers on their territory. In 1889 the Ghost Dance, a circle dance tied to tribal beliefs relating to the spirit world, was revealed in a vision to Hawthorne Wodziwob. In his vision, the spirits of the dead spoke to Wodziwob and promised their aid in driving out the white invaders. The message spread quickly. One Lakota remembered, "They told the people they could dance a new world into being. There would be landslides, earthquakes, and big winds… The earth would roll up like a carpet with all the white man's ugly things – the stinking new animals, sheep and pigs, the fences, the telegraph poles, the mines and factories." Despite the promises, the Ghost Dance did not protect those killed in the Wounded Knee Massacre.

South African shamanism is personal. Sangoma are most often called on for healing and divination by individuals. Their special role in healing comes from the folk belief that sickness is caused by spirits or spiritual pollution. The sangoma know they have been chosen for their role when they fall ill with symptoms that normal medicine cannot heal. Only with help from another sangoma can they become well and undergo the training necessary to help others. By communicating with ancestor spirits through throwing bones, dreams or trances, the sangoma will advise their clients as to what course of treatment they should receive. The spirits may also inform the sangoma on the best time and place to gather herbs so that they are at their most powerful.

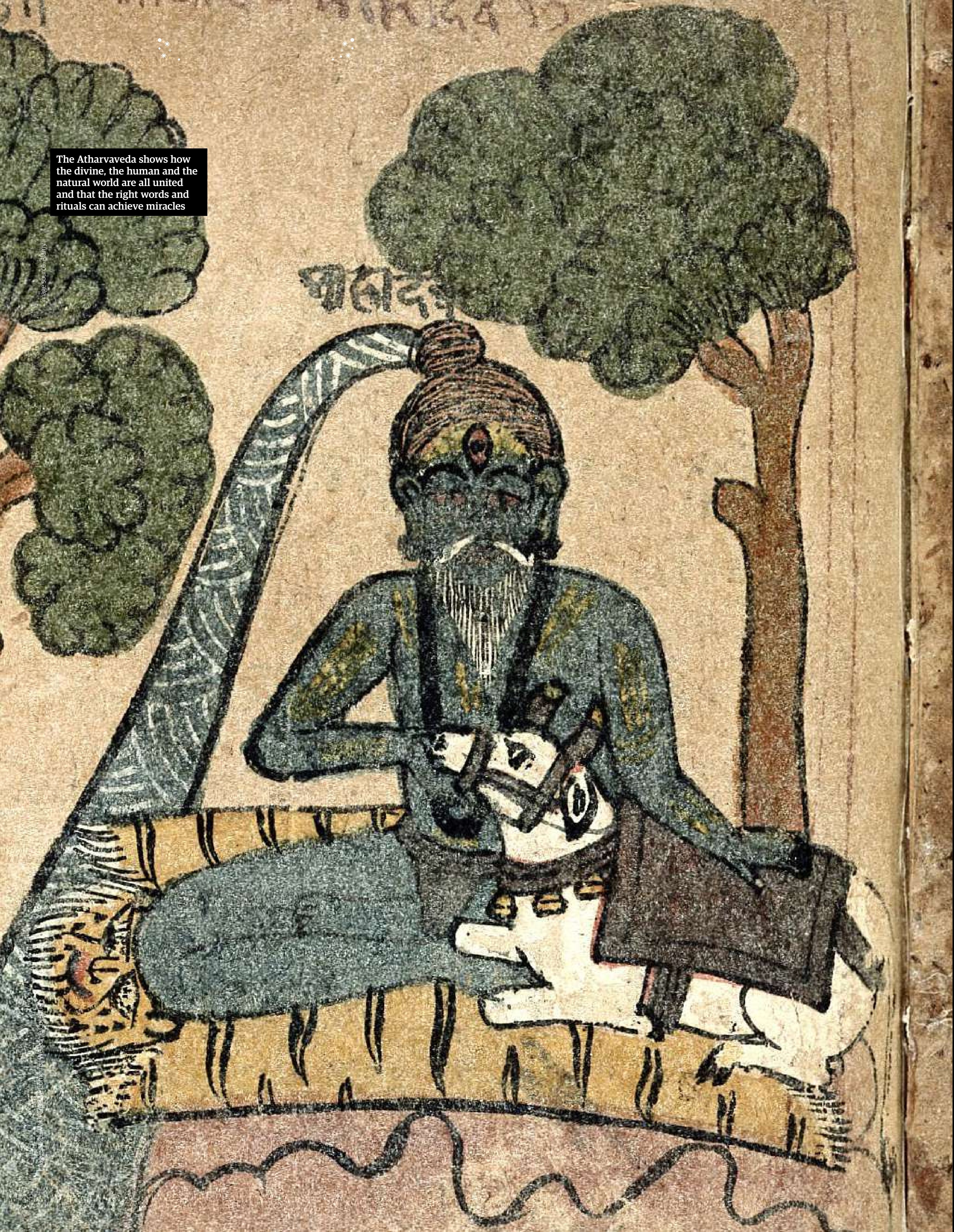
Whether by helping the community as a whole or individually, shamans can play roles in every stage of a person's life. The rituals of a shaman often involve music, singing and dancing. These lend themselves to tribal participation and are social as well as spiritual events. In some cultures, it is the job of the shaman to welcome a baby into the world or to perform rituals like circumcision. The shaman acts as a binding agent for the society by bringing all the living members of a group together, but by also linking them to the spirits of ancestors and the natural world. Even at death, a shaman may be present and called on to act as a psychopomp – one who guides a soul to the afterlife. Thus, the ties of community are not severed even by death.

Yet in discussing shamanism it is important to note that many researchers are uncomfortable with the term. For some the grouping together of such diverse cultures and practices under one term risks drawing false conclusions. Cultural critics note that the term 'shaman' is often one applied only by outsiders to a social function, and may ignore the views of the people it seeks to describe. Another take is that the idea of shamanism is one that is exploited by those who want to use it for their own good. While scholars debate definition, it is vital to look at what draws people to shamanism.

From the more traditional forms of shamanism, people have synthesised a new set of beliefs called Neoshamanism. These tend to pick and choose from the various practices of peoples around the world. There are also those, particularly in the West, who are also trying to reconnect with shamanistic traditions in their authentic settings. People may travel thousands of miles to undergo shamanic rituals that allow them to travel deeper into themselves and commune with powers outside of their daily lives. This has always been the aim of the shaman and it seems there is a constant human thirst for their wisdom.

© Alamy, Creative Commons, Malcolm Lidbury

"Working To Beat The
Alaska
An Alaskan shaman wearing a traditional outfit. Shamans are often masked to mark their role as a mediator between worlds



The Atharvaveda shows how the divine, the human and the natural world are all united and that the right words and rituals can achieve miracles

Image source: Alamy

Image source: Wiki/ Creative Comoms/ Wellcome Collection

THE ATHARVAVEDA

One of the foundational texts of Hinduism offers to fulfil believers' desires – if they use the spells it contains

Written by Ben Gazur

The Atharvaveda is one of the four Vedas - bodies of religious texts from ancient India written in Sanskrit. Composed from many different writings in around 1000 BCE, the Atharvaveda has been hugely influential in shaping Hindu and Indian thought, philosophy and religion. The Atharvaveda is sometimes known as the Veda of charms, incantations and spells, with some claiming that its author was the mythical priest Atharvan who inaugurated the use of fire sacrifices.

Hundreds of hymns to invoke the gods and practical guides to procedures to achieve your goals are to be found in the Atharvaveda. Portions of the text offer advice on the proper way to wrap a compound fracture with the leaves of the Rohini plant - but also give the correct charm to be pronounced over the wound to ensure it heals. The earthly and the divine are strongly linked and both must be called on for a spell to work.

Other charms in the Atharvaveda offer help in driving out emotional difficulties and fears. Jealousy can be removed by speaking a charm that compares it to air that is wafted away, clearing the heart. For those who fear sorcery and demons, a piece of lead can be enchanted to pierce the heart of any who would wrong you by calling on the protection of the Hindu gods. Since charms that cause harm were only used on evildoers they were still considered auspicious, and were thought appropriate even for those of the Brahmin caste.

As it represents folk religion and tradition, it took a long time for the Atharvaveda to be accepted as a Veda

Most of the charms and hymns contained in the Atharvaveda are written in a metrical form hinting at their being read or spoken aloud. Because of the emphasis placed on solving real-world problems - such as the charm against worms in children - the Atharvaveda is sometimes seen as part of popular religion as opposed to the esoteric thoughts about the nature of the gods found in the other Vedas. Sushruta, author of one of the great texts of Indian medicine, credited much of his knowledge to the Atharvaveda. The Indian medical tradition of Ayurveda can be linked directly to this Veda. Much can be learned about the Vedic society that the charms derived from by studying its verses.

Because of a certain distaste for the verse found in the Atharvaveda its use slowly began to wither away. Today there are very few scholars trained in the Atharvaveda, while thousands teach the other Vedas.

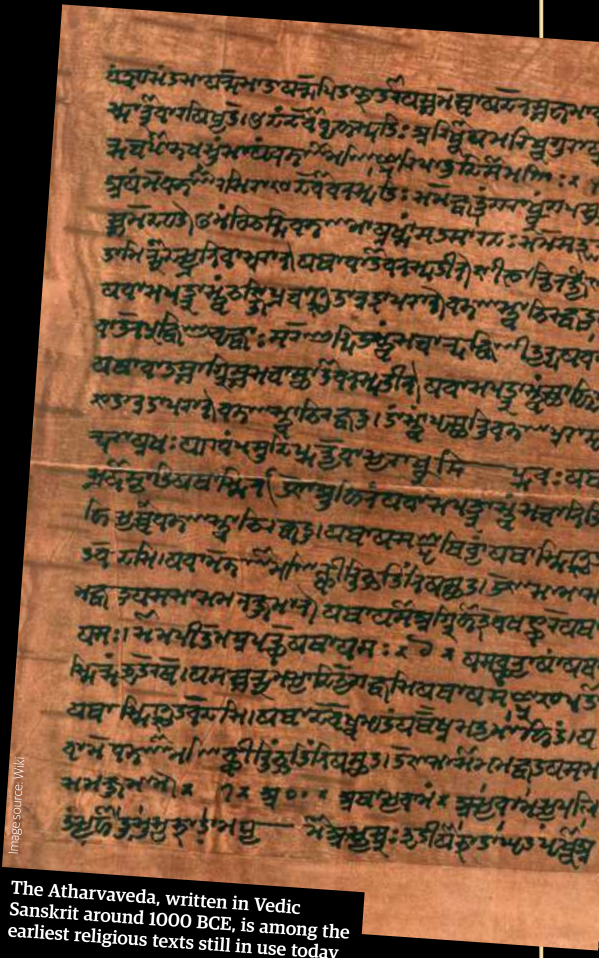


Image source: Wiki

The Atharvaveda, written in Vedic Sanskrit around 1000 BCE, is among the earliest religious texts still in use today

GREEK MAGICAL PAPYRI

Every year more of the myths, hymns, spells and rituals of ancient magic are rediscovered as fragile papyri come to light

Written by Ben Gazur

The ancient world was steeped in magic. From the chanting of priests at a sacrifice to private imprecations muttered in the home, there was a magical solution to all of life's problems. Many, if not most, of the magical texts and rituals in use at the time have since been lost, but a project is underway to recover as much as possible of these traditions.

The Greek Magical Papyri are texts, mostly from Egypt, of spells, charms and rituals written in Greek and preserved on papyrus fragments. They date back to between the 2nd to 5th centuries CE when Greek was the language used in much of the eastern Mediterranean for trade and literature. From the 17th century antiquarians began to buy up as many of these precious relics of antiquity as they could. It was soon noticed that many of these texts were not from the known works of the ancients but rather seemed to deal with esoteric matters and magic.

> The Greek Magical Papyri were not organised into this collection at the time they were written - they were gathered together later

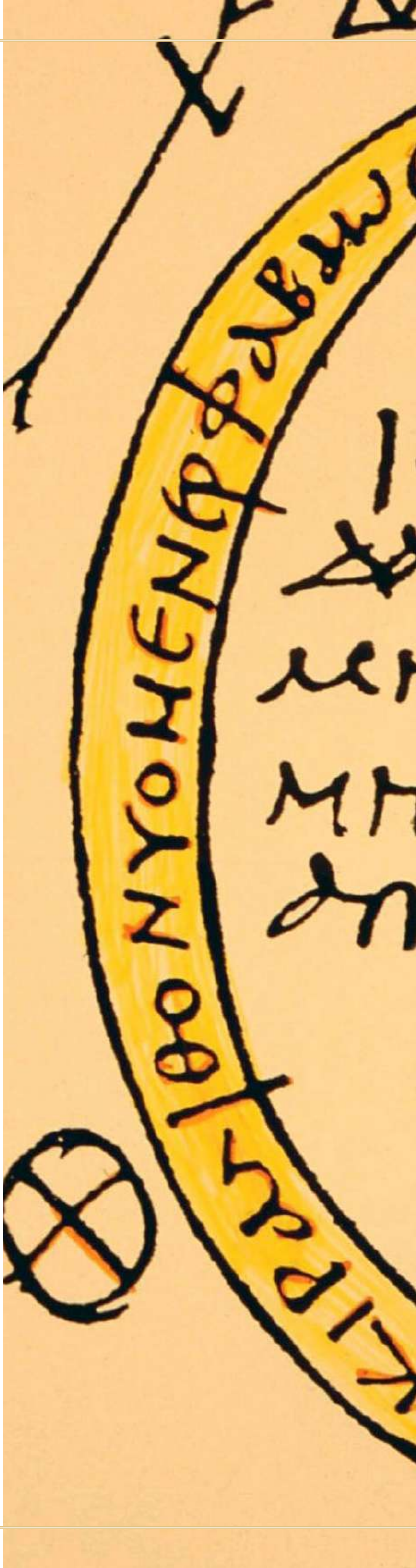
Gathered together by modern scholars, the Greek Magical Papyri were never meant to be seen as a single work but instead give us glimpses of magical traditions from several places and times. It is possible to find hymns to the traditional pagan gods of the Greeks in many of the fragments but often these songs are tied to magical rituals. One hymn to Helios is intended to summon up a spiritual helper: "Send me the daimon who will give responses to me about everything which I order him to speak about." Intriguingly this hymn makes mention of scarabs and other Egyptian religious motifs, suggesting a synthesis of Greek and Egyptian ideas. Anubis and Hermes are called on side by side. Other papyri call on spirits with names found nowhere else in Greek or Egyptian traditions.

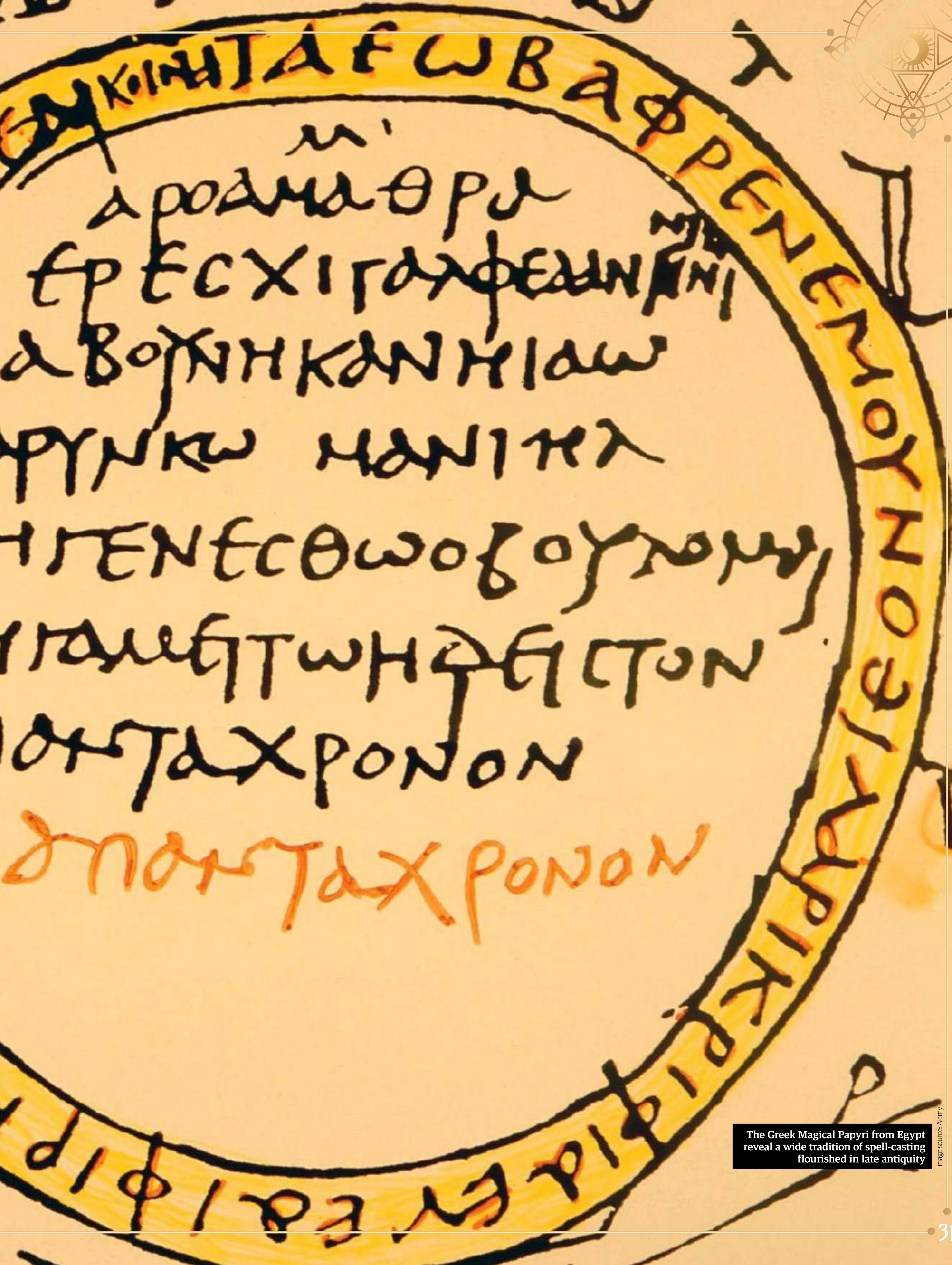
Ritual could be just as important as the words spoken. To bind a lover to you required using clay from a potter's wheel to create male and female figures that one covered in mystical writing and then pierced with needles. Many spells required animal ingredients to work - with donkey parts apparently being the most common.

Debate still rages over how most of these texts were seen by the ancients. Were they the preserve of the priestly classes trying to invent new forms of magic and worship? Or were they the product of a popular magical movement for those whom the old gods were no longer sufficient?

Image source: Wiki

The Greek Magical Papyri show influences from ancient Egyptian, Jewish and Christian traditions





The Greek Magical Papyri from Egypt reveal a wide tradition of spell-casting flourished in late antiquity

Image source: Alamy

THE EMERALD TABLET

A hidden formula to create gold? A key to enlightenment? Is this arcane text alchemical obfuscation or mysterious magic?

Written by Paul Walker-Emig

The Emerald Tablet is a cryptic, much-studied and repeatedly reinterpreted passage of writing that many have pondered over for centuries in an attempt to unlock its secrets. It was commonly believed by European alchemists up until the 15th century that the text was a code describing laboratory processes, a secret recipe that might lead them to the Philosopher's Stone – the ability to turn common metals into gold. Conversely, 16th-century alchemists tended to interpret the text spiritually, believing it to point towards a way to summon angels and commune with God.

The text is attributed to the *Hermetica*, a series of Egyptian-Greek texts from the 2nd century onwards that European alchemists considered the foundation of their practice. It was translated multiple times into multiple languages, appearing in Arabic, Latin and English.

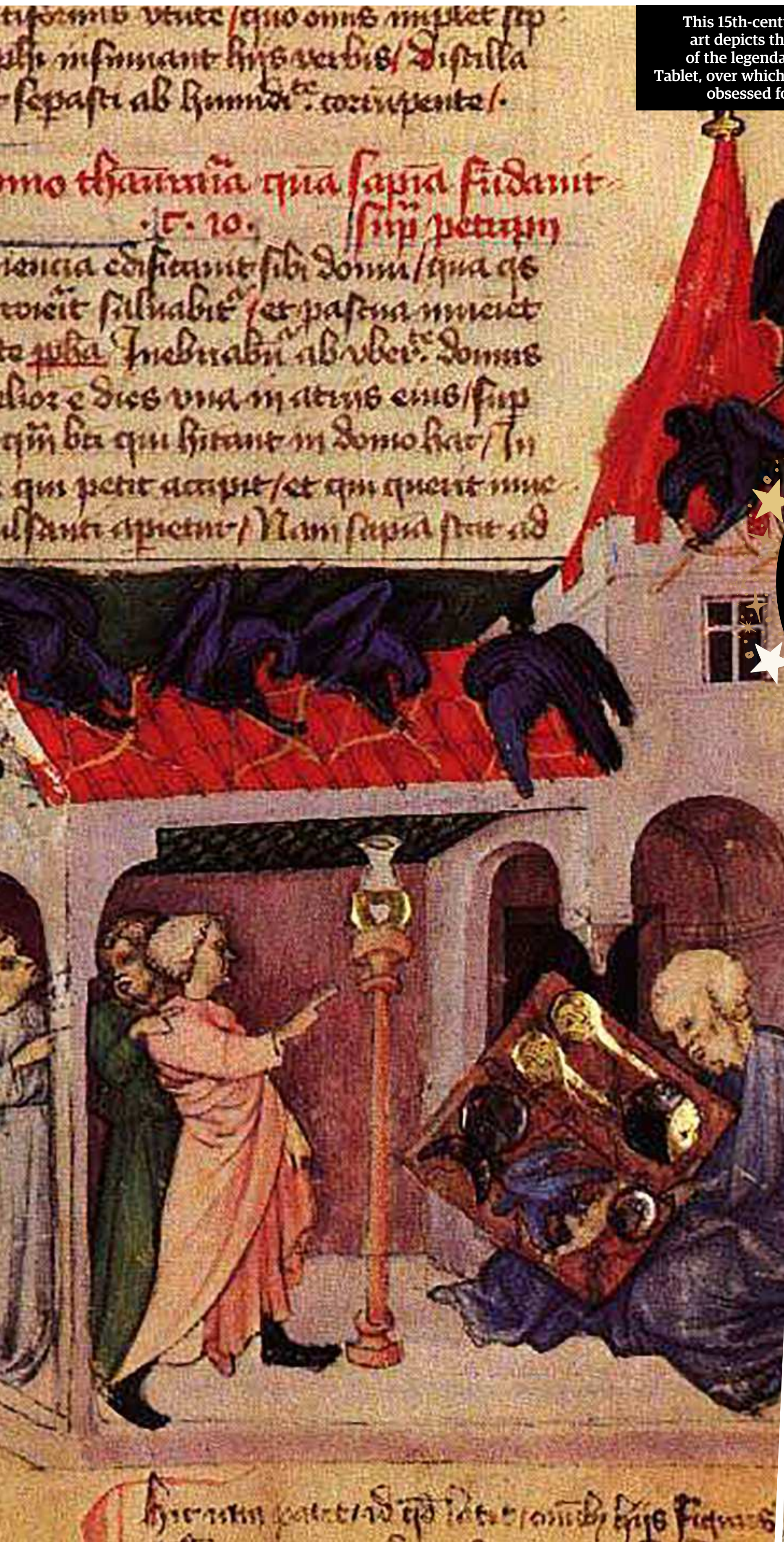
Isaac Newton's translation of the Emerald Tablet reads as follows:

"Tis true without lying, certain and most true.

That which is below is like that which is above
and that which is above is like that which is
below to do the miracles of one only thing

And as all things have been and arose from one
by the mediation of one:
so all things have their birth from this one thing
by adaptation.

The Sun is its father,
the moon its mother,
the wind hath carried it in its belly,
the earth is its nurse.
The father of all perfection in the whole world
is here.



This 15th-century work of art depicts the discovery of the legendary Emerald Tablet, over which alchemists obsessed for centuries

Its force or power is entire if it be converted
into earth.
Separate thou the earth from the fire,
the subtle from the gross
sweetly with great industry.
It ascends from the earth to the heaven
and again it descends to the earth
and receives the force of things superior
and inferior.

By this means you shall have the glory of the whole
world and thereby all obscurity shall fly from you.

Its force is above all force,
for it vanquishes every subtle thing and penetrates
every solid thing.

So was the world created.
From this are and do come
admirable adaptations
where of the means is here
in this.

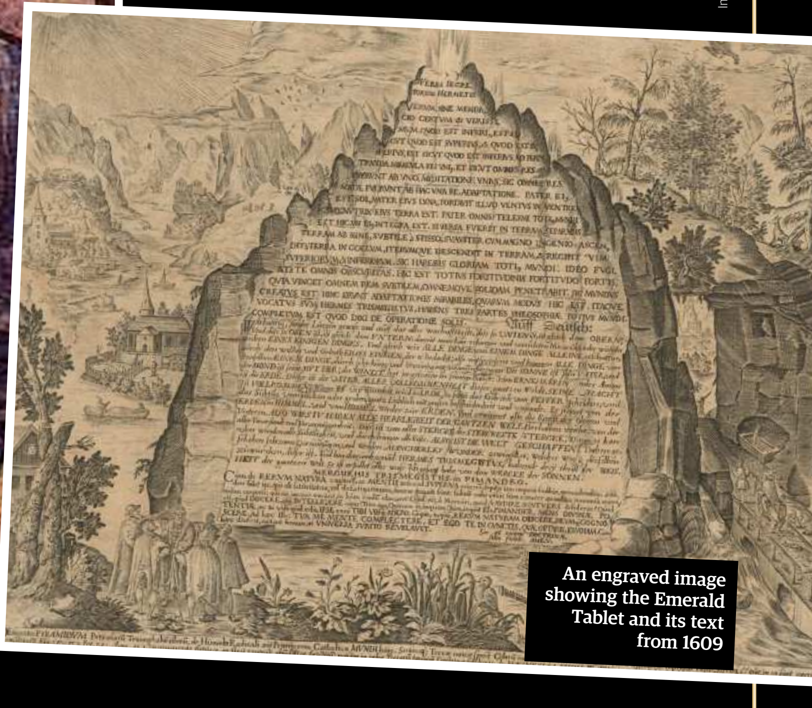
Hence I am called Hermes
Trismegist, having the three parts
of the philosophy of the
whole world.

That which I have said of the operation of
the Sun is accomplished and ended."

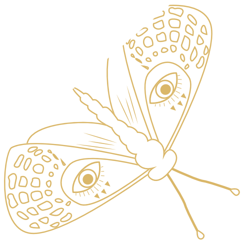
The important magical philosophy "As above, so below" was first recorded in the Emerald Tablet

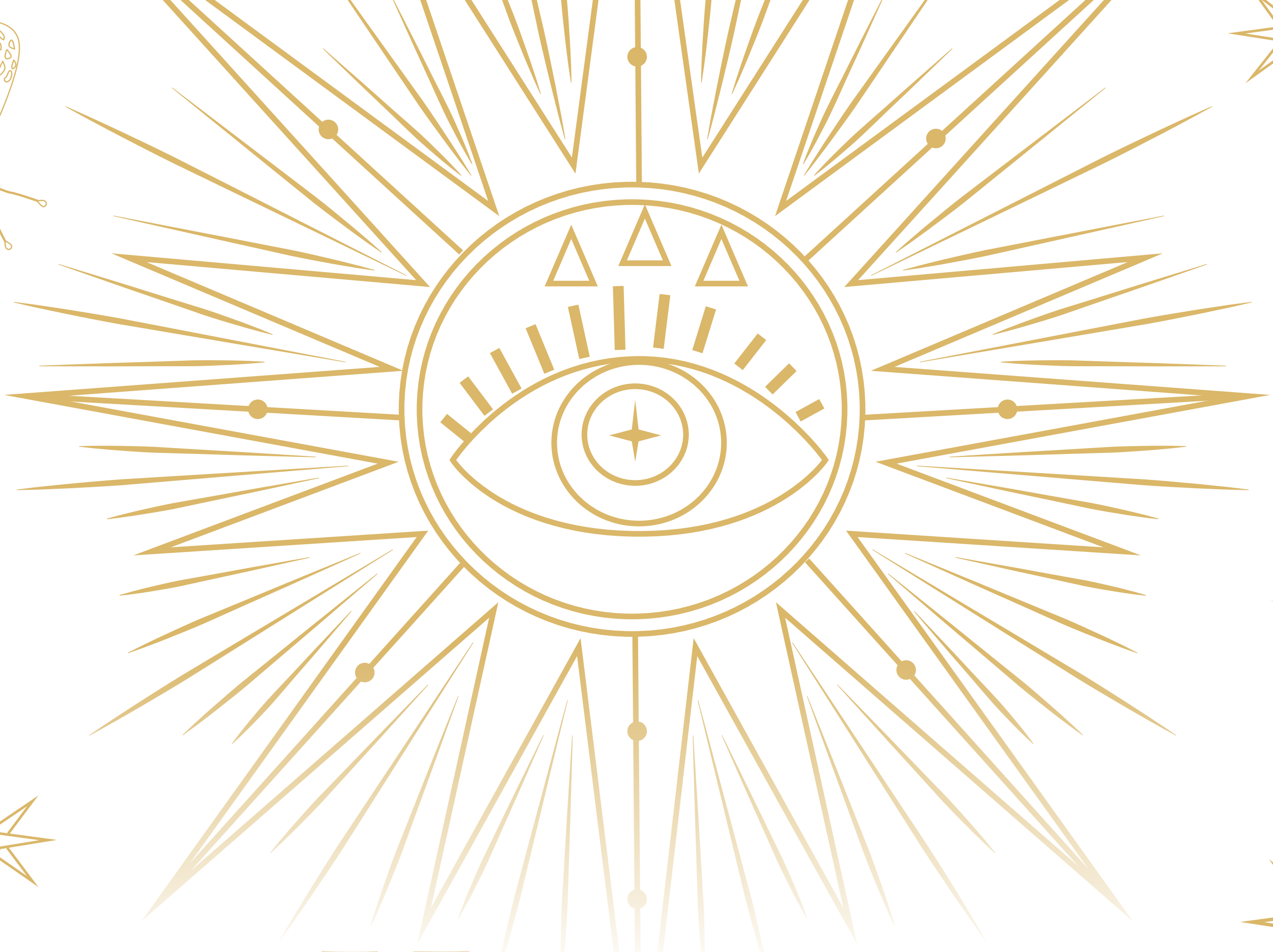
With references to the principle of unity, the four elements and the three principles, its importance to alchemy is clear, as is its rich metaphorical and allegorical texture – it's no wonder alchemists, and later magicians, have been able to meditate on this passage and its meaning for centuries.

Images source: Wiki



An engraved image showing the Emerald Tablet and its text from 1609

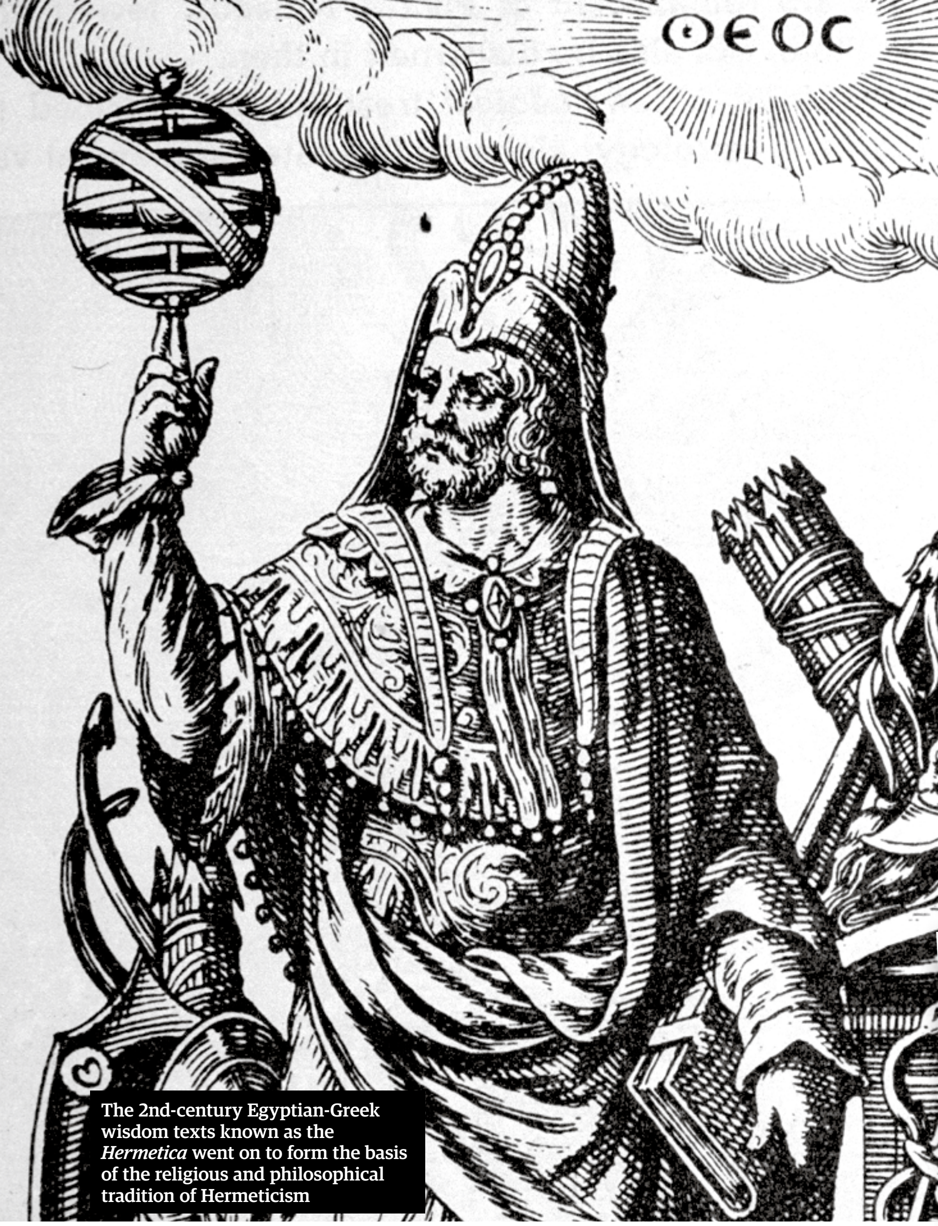




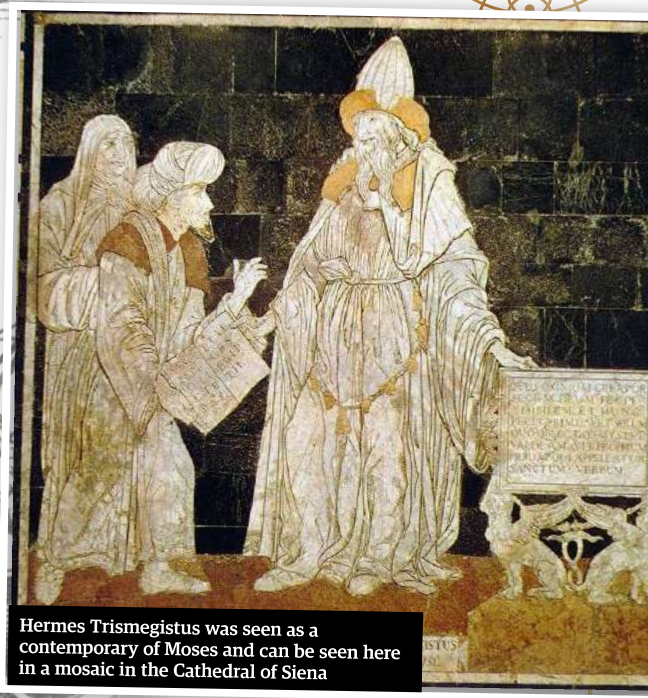
HERMES TRISMEGISTUS AND THE HERMETICA

Through sharing his teachings. Hermes Trismegistus inspired generations of alchemists, philosophers and occultists in many different ways

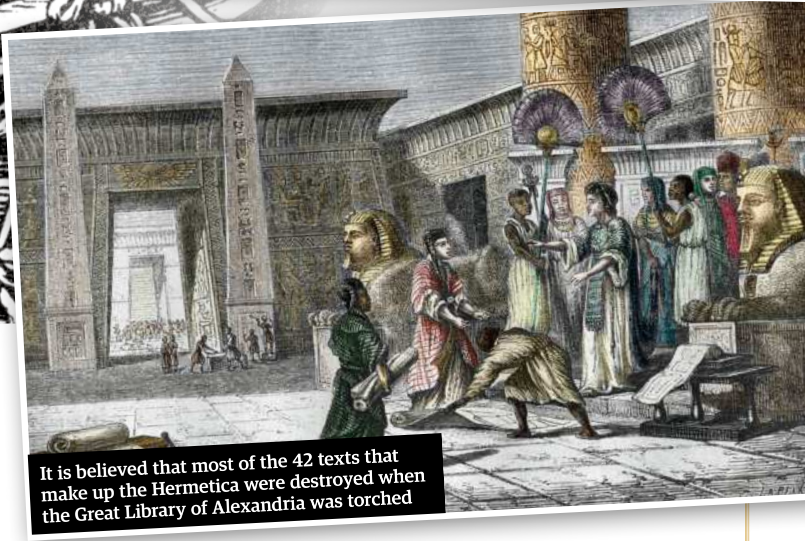
Written by Poppy Jay Palmer



The 2nd-century Egyptian-Greek wisdom texts known as the *Hermetica* went on to form the basis of the religious and philosophical tradition of Hermeticism



Hermes Trismegistus was seen as a contemporary of Moses and can be seen here in a mosaic in the Cathedral of Siena



It is believed that most of the 42 texts that make up the Hermetica were destroyed when the Great Library of Alexandria was torched

During the Renaissance, alchemists looked to a number of texts written by experts in their field for guidance, but none were as important as the *Hermetica*, a collection of Egyptian-Greek wisdom texts from the 2nd century CE allegedly written by Hermes Trismegistus. The texts were mostly composed as dialogues in which a teacher enlightens one of his disciples through discussions of the divine, the cosmos, mind and nature, touching upon alchemy, astrology and other related concepts. The *Hermetica*, or The Corpus Hermeticum, went on to form the basis of the religious, philosophical and esoteric tradition now known as Hermeticism.

Hermes Trismegistus is thought to be a syncretic mix of the Greek god Hermes and the Egyptian god Thoth

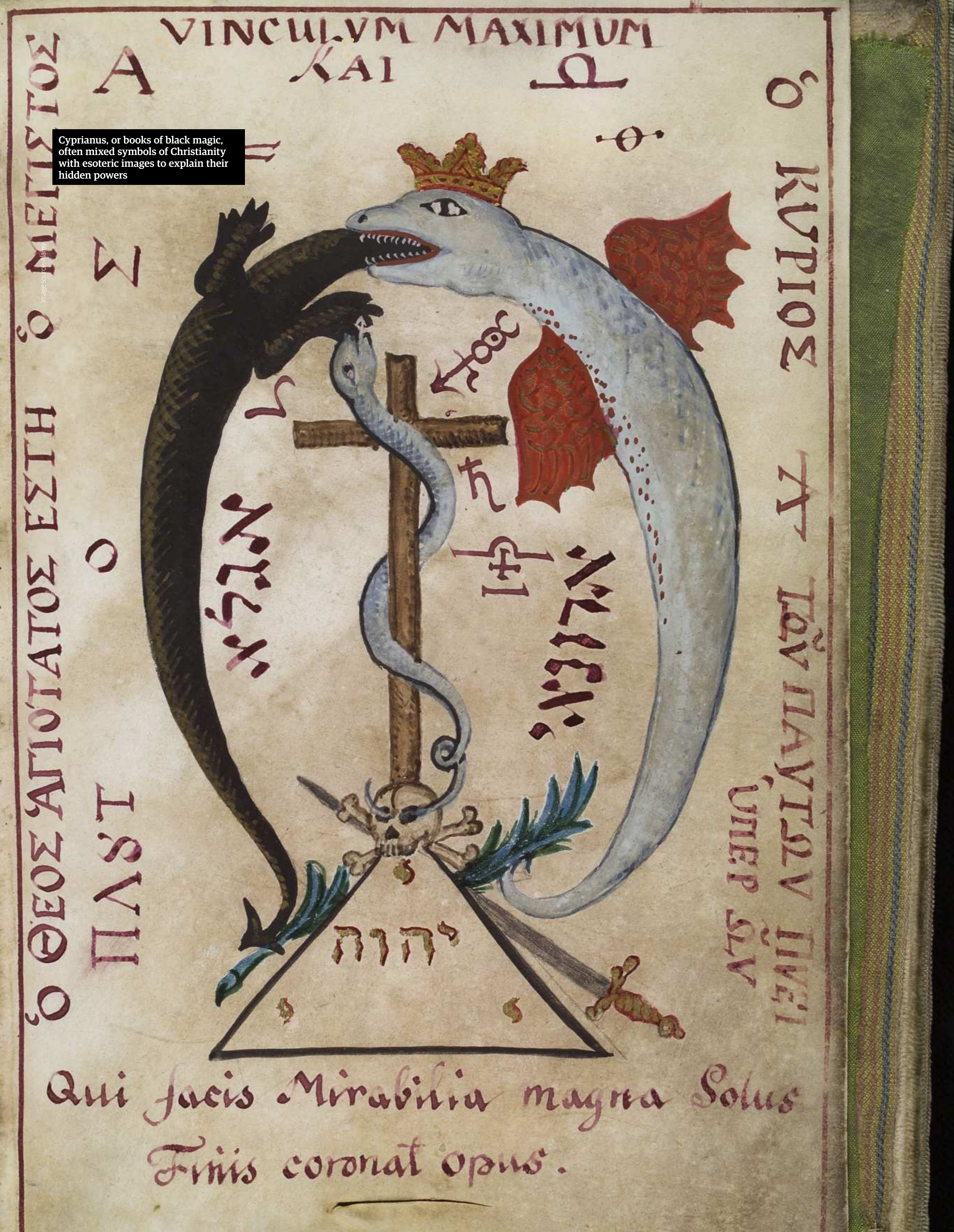
The texts that make up the *Hermetica* are just one part of a larger picture, remnants of a more extensive literature of the syncretic intellectualised paganism of the era, and they helped to spur on a cultural movement that included the Neoplatonic philosophy of the Graeco-Roman mysteries, among others. However, the texts were not concerned with Greek mythology, nor the details of metaphysical Neoplatonism.

Instead, they were influenced by Judaism and refer to Genesis 1:28.

Though the texts were lost to Western culture during the Middle Ages, they were rediscovered during the Renaissance and, following a translation by Marsilio Ficino, enjoyed much popularity among alchemists as more and more people bought into the ideas that Hermes Trismegistus presented. Its teachings went on to influence philosophers like Giordano Bruno and Pico della Mirandola and had a profound impact on alchemy. Opposed by the Church, the teachings from the text became part of the occult underworld, resulting in Hermeticism being infused into occultism and gaining great influence in Western magical traditions. In all, the Hermetic tradition attributes 42 books to Hermes, but most of these were reportedly destroyed when Egypt's Great Library of Alexandria was set ablaze during Julius Caesar's siege of the city. As a result, very little of the texts are easily accessible to non-specialists. However, some modern occultists believe that the texts that contain the author's religious beliefs and philosophies remain hidden somewhere in a secret library.

The Hermetic New Age revival has led to Hermes Trismegistus being associated with several wives and at least one son who took his name and passed it on for generations. It is also widely believed that his offspring pursued careers as priests in unknown religions, which partly explains how both the legend of the *Hermetica* and of Hermes Trismegistus himself have endured to the modern age despite the fact that the *Hermetica* could well have been destroyed long ago.

Images source: Getty, Wiki


VINCULUM MAXIMUM
Α ΚΑΙ Ω
Ὁ ΘΕΟΣ ἉΓΙΟΤΑΤΟΣ ΕΣΤΗ Ὁ ΜΕΓΙΣΤΟΣ
Ὁ ΚΥΡΙΟΣ Τ ΤΩΝ ΠΑΝΤΩΝ ΠΝΕΙ ὙΠΕΡ ὮΝ
יהוה
Qui facis Mirabilia magna Solus
Finis coronat opus.

Cyprianus, or books of black magic, often mixed symbols of Christianity with esoteric images to explain their hidden powers

Image source: Alamy

CYPRIANUS AND THE BLACK BOOKS

The secret books of magic and knowledge that captured all of the wisdom important to the people of Scandinavia

Written by Ben Gazur

Grimoires – books of magic and spells – have been important to many people and in many places. In rural communities like those in Scandinavia in previous centuries the recorded wisdom held in these books could be life saving. Known as 'Black Books', or 'Cyprianus', these magical texts came in many forms – each held a unique collection of wisdom. Cunning folk, those learned in the folk arts and traditional healing, would often keep their own Cyprianus and add to the manuscript as they gained more knowledge. Even in the 19th century people might fear the owner of a Cyprianus. One minister eased the fears of his congregation by stealing one from its owner to stop him using magic.

> The books are possibly named in honour of St Cyprian, who was thought to practise magic before converting to Christianity

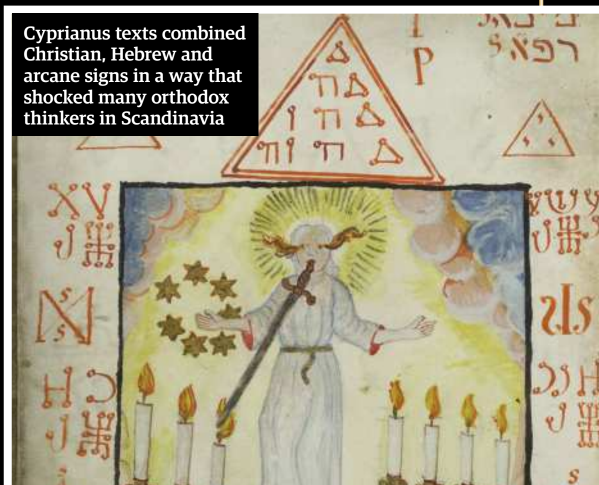
Written in the vernacular, the knowledge contained in them could be anything from herbal remedies to spells to ward off trolls. Many prefaces to these books suggested their contents were truly encyclopedic.

"The main book of Cyprian: Contains all the teaching which is possessed by the evil spirits in the abyss which is proclaimed about secret things and hidden treasures, about theft, about recalling, and numerous liberal arts and... together with his introduction where each stands as a prescription to the exercise of sorcery, and the recalling of sorcery in addition fishing and hunting, spellbinding, capturing and manifold enjoyable and useful liberal arts, and Naturalia..."

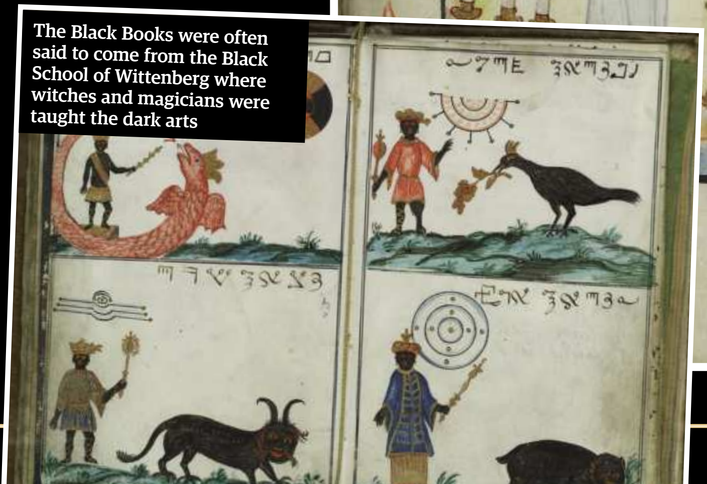
Many legends were attached to the various Black Books. Some claimed that the books were won by pledging the owner's soul to Satan. Once in possession of a Cyprianus it was almost impossible to get rid of it. Fire, water and burial were all ineffective and those that tried to unburden themselves of a Cyprianus would find it magically returning to their ownership. Despite the infernal associations of these books they were often owned by ministers. With few doctors or other educated people in a region it often fell to the local minister, or his wife, to act as healer, adviser and comforter. A book with many solutions to life's problems would have been invaluable to them.

Many of the spells found in Cyprianus books mingled Christianity with folk traditions. Cures might call on Jesus to heal a wound by comparing the patient's injury to one Jesus himself had suffered. Other forms of sympathetic magic relied on passing pain and illness to an inanimate object. Sometimes the aid offered by Cyprianus was entirely pagan – such as offering methods of divination to act against the wicked huldra-folk (forest creatures found in northern folklore).

> "Many spells found in Cyprianus books mingled Christianity with folk traditions"



Cyprianus texts combined Christian, Hebrew and arcane signs in a way that shocked many orthodox thinkers in Scandinavia



The Black Books were often said to come from the Black School of Wittenberg where witches and magicians were taught the dark arts

Image source: Creative Commons/ Wellcome Collection

THE MERSEBURG CHARMS

The only surviving German pagan spells recorded in Old High German hint at a wider magical culture

Written by Ben Gazur

In 1841 the historian Georg Waitz discovered two old German spells contained in a manuscript held in the cathedral of Merseburg. Quite unlike anything else that had been found written in Old High German, these spells represented the complete remains of a lost magical tradition. Written on a blank page of a theological treatise probably in the 10th century the Merseburg Incantations, or Charms, were soon made famous by Jacob Grimm.

The Merseburg Charms have close parallels in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian spells from the same period

The first charm explains how Idisen (ghosts or spirits) once freed warriors who had been captured in battle. After explaining the situation the text tells us the words used in this Lösesegen – charm of release. Those looking to escape their chains would just have to say, "Leap forth from the fetters, flee from the foes."

The second charm is intended for use when a horse hurts its foot. One day, we are told, the gods were riding through the forest when Balder's foal suffers a sprain. Wodan speaks the following charm over it:

> *"Like bone-sprain, so blood-sprain,*
> *so joint-sprain:*
> *Bone to bone, blood to blood,*
> *joints to joints, so may they be glued."*

Though we have no other examples in Old High German, these charms appear to be what were known as 'galstar' – songs and enchantments. Examples of similar 'galdr' are known from the Norse world, which follow a similar pattern of setting a scene before explaining the charm to be used. We do not know who wrote the Merseburg Incantations down or why but they do allow comparisons to other European magical traditions to be made. Jacob Grimm, who first publicised these charms, also knew of a spell to be used in healing a horse's leg from Norway. In the Norwegian spell instead of a pagan god it is Jesus who is riding a horse that has gone lame. "Jesus laid marrow to marrow, bone to bone, flesh to flesh."

Other examples of horse-healing spells that follow a similar pattern have been discovered in Sweden, Denmark and Scotland. In one form from Shetland Jesus commands his horse to "set joint to joint, bone to bone, and sinew to sinew, heal in the Holy Ghost's name!" Intriguingly this spell was recorded as being used on a person with a broken leg and required the charm to be silently uttered while a thread was wrapped around the limb. If ritual actions were ever attached to the Merseburg Incantations, they have unfortunately been lost to us.

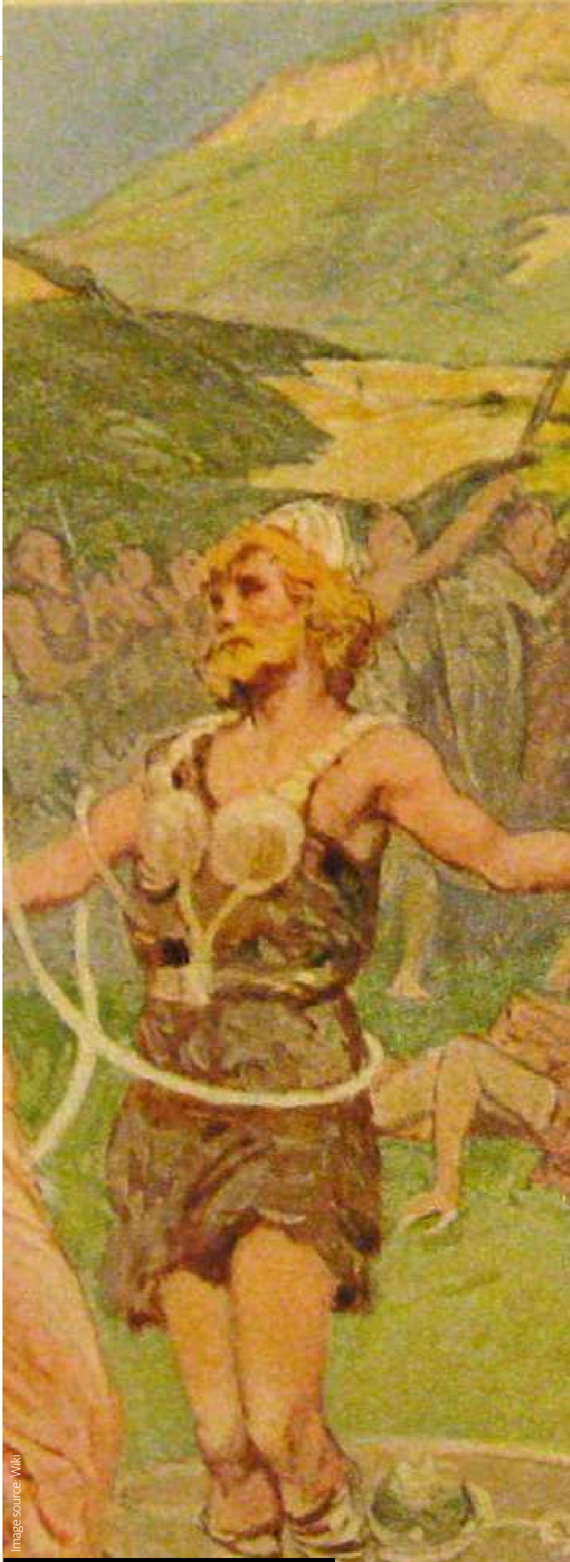
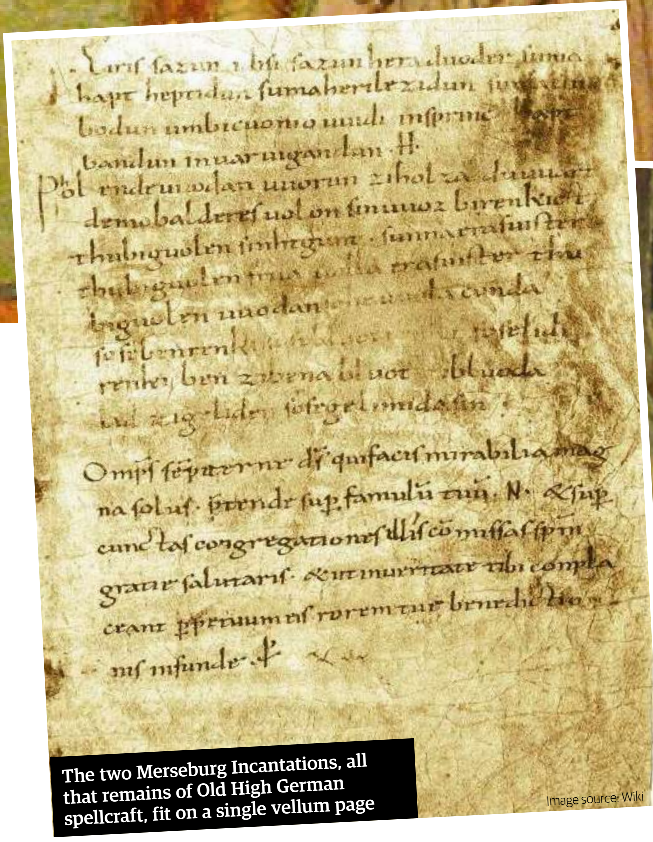


Image source: Wiki

Those seeking to escape their shackles need only to remember the Merseburg Incantation for loosening of bindings

"These spells represented the complete remains of a lost magical tradition"



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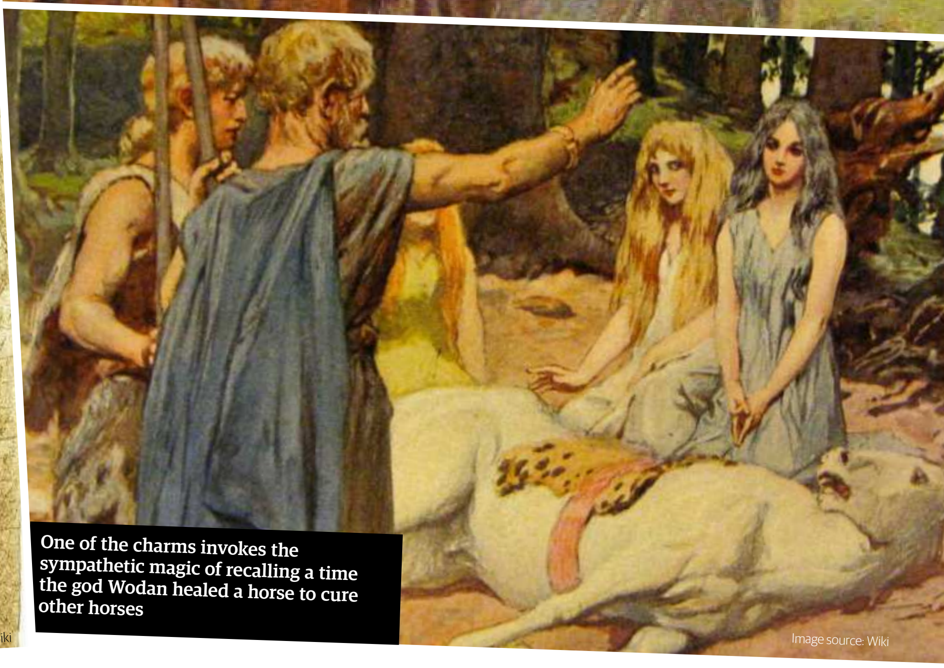
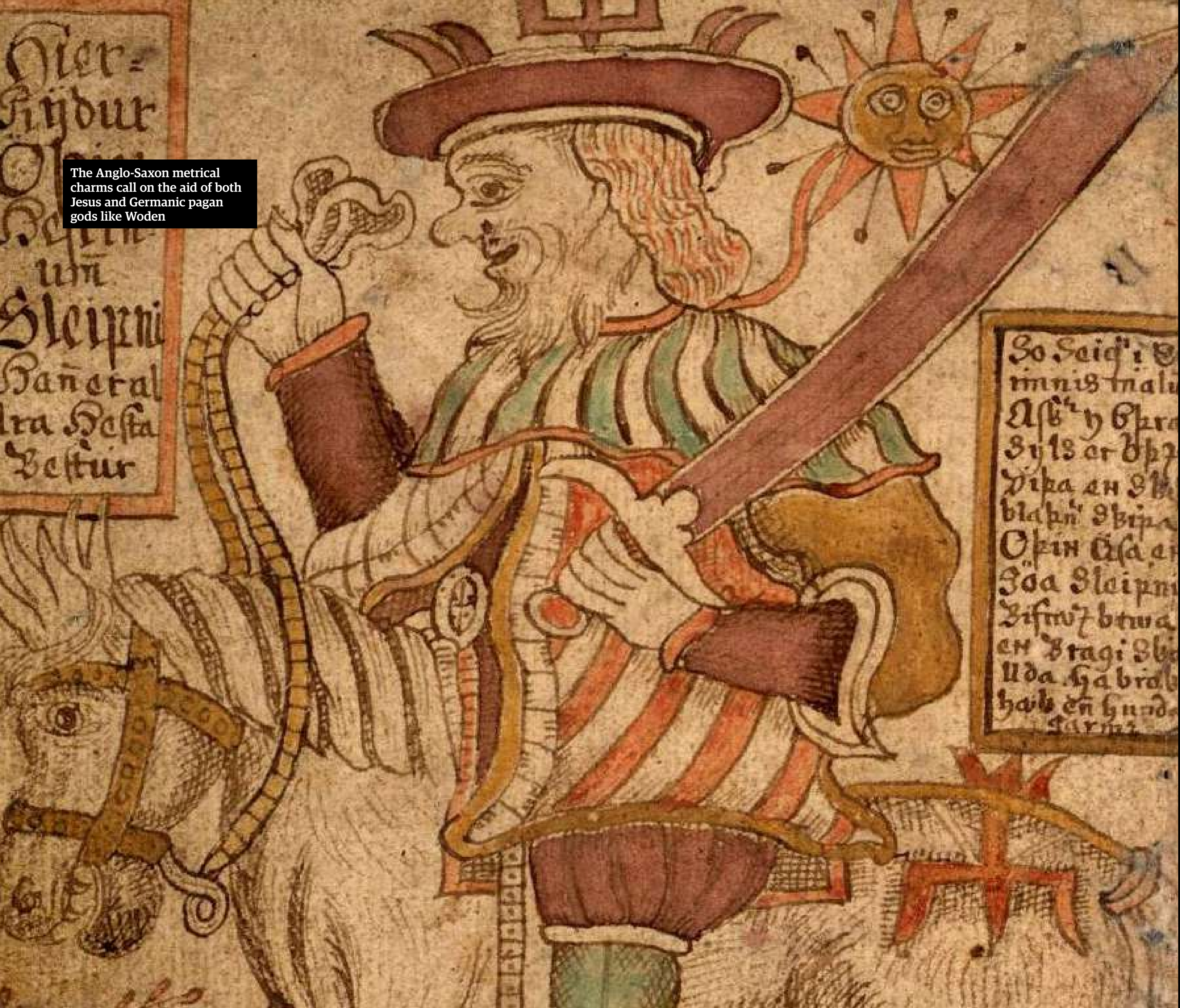
The two Merseburg Incantations, all that remains of Old High German spellcraft, fit on a single vellum page

Image source: Wiki



One of the charms invokes the sympathetic magic of recalling a time the god Wodan healed a horse to cure other horses

Image source: Wiki


Hier
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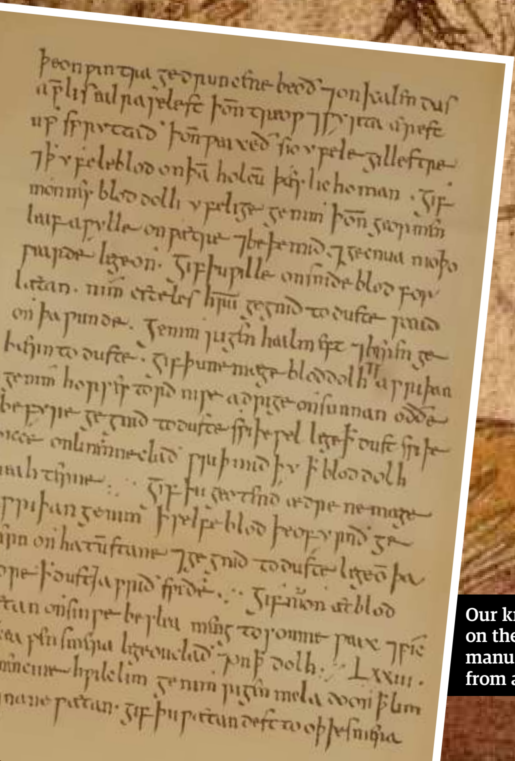
blapn Skipa
Odin Asa e
Sua Sleipni
Bifrost brua
en Bragi Sk
lda Habrok
haukan en hunda
Garmr

The Anglo-Saxon metrical charms call on the aid of both Jesus and Germanic pagan gods like Woden



Our knowledge of the charms depends on the unlikely survival of fragile manuscripts like *Bald's Leechbook* from around the 9th century

ANGLO-SAXON METRICAL CHARMS

Whether to ward off a wen or protect yourself from a swarm of bees, the Anglo-Saxons had a spell for everything

Written by Ben Gazur

The Anglo-Saxon world was one of poetry where words spoken well held power. The person who could summon up a poem over their mead was a respected figure, or sometimes more than that. Poetry had the power to change the world.

Recorded in the rare surviving manuscripts from the Anglo-Saxon period are several magical spells written in poetic form in Old English. The charms are contained in medical treatises from the 9th and 10th century, such as the *Lacnunga* and *Bald's Leechbook* that recorded the practical healing knowledge of the age. Alongside medicines were written cures that required the aid of the supernatural to be efficacious.

The charm 'Against A Wen' is for removing a spot by telling it to shrink, disappear and leave after a leaf is put on it

In the handful of these metrical enchantments that have been preserved many eventualities are considered; from blessing a field, to recovering lost cows, to the mysterious 'Against a Dwarf'. Examining the charms gives us a view into a world quite different from our own.

Though by the time the charms were written down much of Britain was largely Christianised, they contain references to Anglo-Saxon and Germanic mythology. The 'Nine Herbs Charm' describes the uses of nine different plants in medicine, such as nettles driving out poison and mugwort fighting infection. In its explanation of how these herbs gained their power it states that:

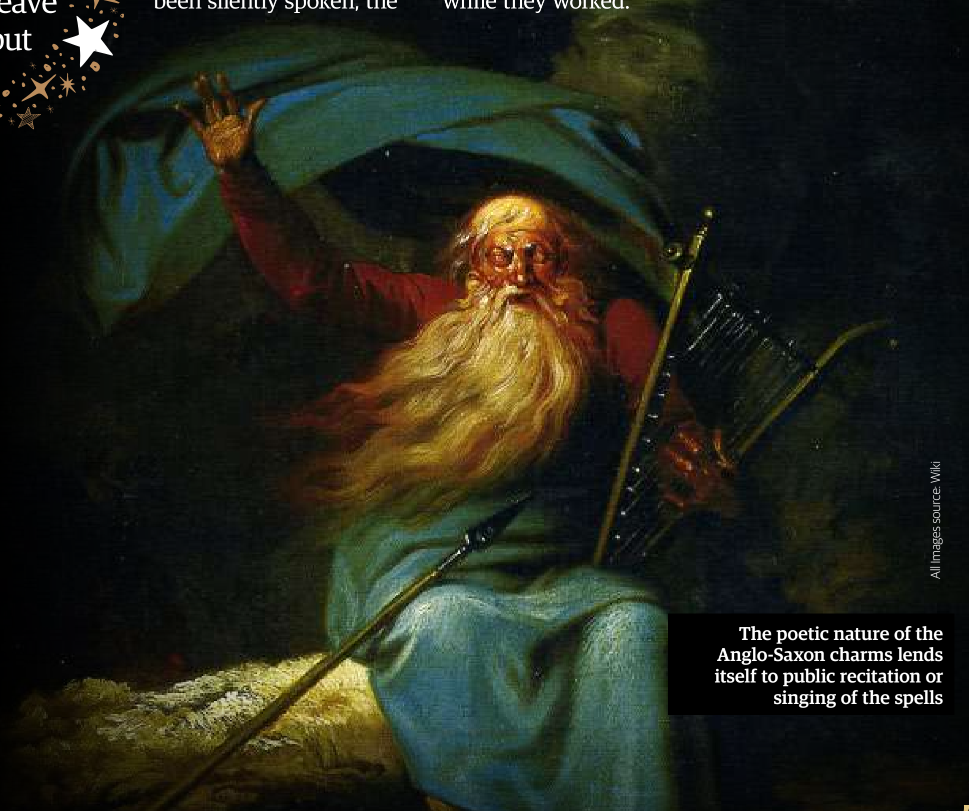
"A snake came crawling, it bit a man.
Then Woden took nine glory-twigs,
Smote the serpent so that it flew into nine parts."

Woden, a chief god of the Germanic pantheon, is explicitly named even as the charm later mentions, "if any poison comes… over the nations of men, Christ stood over illness as none other."

Many scholars see the invocation of Jesus as an addition by a Christian scribe, or potentially as an example of leaving no deity unturned in a crisis.

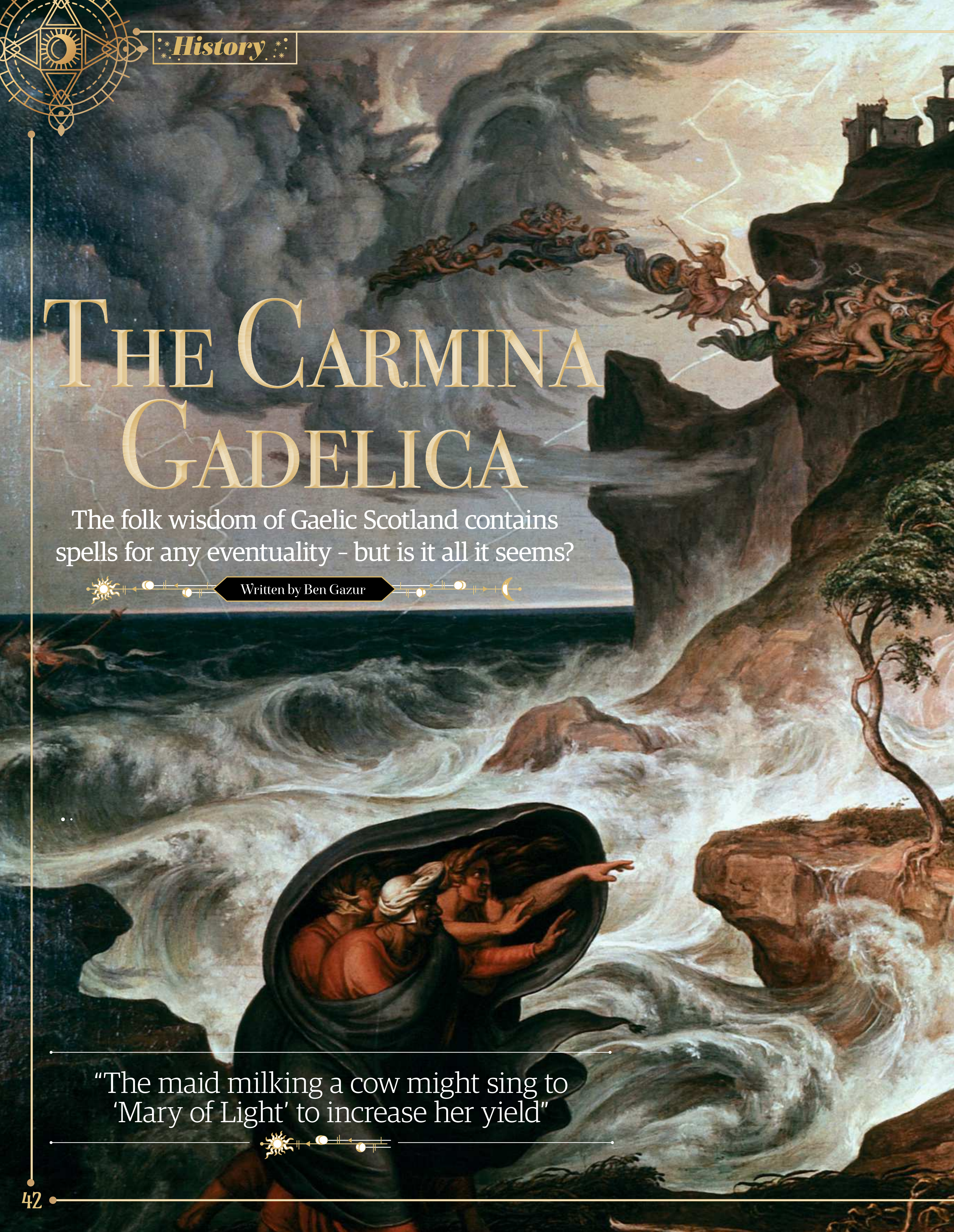
That these charms were actually used is in little doubt. Unlike prayers which may have been silently spoken, the metrical charms were to be performed out loud. Those who wrote the charms down sometimes included notes about exactly how the incantations were to be made: either cwean (spoken) or singan (sung). Written in the vernacular language of the age these spells were obviously created and used by the people rather than the learned few, and they reflect common concerns.

Lest we think these poems and charms are meaningless gibberish one group of scientists tested a cure from the 'Nine Herbs Charm' and found it was effective against MRSA. We do not, however, know if the researchers sang any of the poetry while they worked.



All Images source: Wiki

The poetic nature of the Anglo-Saxon charms lends itself to public recitation or singing of the spells



THE CARMINA GADELICA

The folk wisdom of Gaelic Scotland contains spells for any eventuality - but is it all it seems?

Written by Ben Gazur

> "The maid milking a cow might sing to 'Mary of Light' to increase her yield"

Starting in 1860, Alexander Carmichael, an excise man and amateur folklorist, spent over 50 years gathering together everything he thought was at risk of vanishing from his native Scotland. In the Highlands and Outer Hebrides where he travelled for his job he collected folklore, spells, charms, poems, blessings and prayers from the Gaelic communities he met. Carmichael brought all that he had learned together in two volumes that he called the *Carmina Gadelica* – 'The Hymns of the Gael'.

With a fondness and sympathy for the people he met, describing them as "goodly to see, brave to endure, and pleasing to know," Carmichael amassed hundreds of notebooks full of folk wisdom. Eventually the *Carmina Gadelica* would grow to six volumes as his heirs published more of his findings.

Many of the invocations that Carmichael recorded were in the form of prayers to Jesus and would not have scandalised even the most censorious, puritan Victorian. One 'Bed Blessing' includes the lines:

"I am lying down to-night with God,
And God to-night will lie down with me,
I will not lie down to-night with sin, nor shall
Sin nor sin's shadow lie down with me."

Yet other rituals and sayings he recorded went beyond what traditional Christianity would normally allow. The maid milking a cow might sing to 'Mary of Light' to increase her yield or the fisherman might sprinkle water over his boat while calling on God and row precisely 707 strokes before casting his hook. To many people these were mere superstitions like the charms and spells found elsewhere in the *Carmina Gadelica*.

A charm against jaundice makes no mention of God but in rhythmic poetry commands all manner of illness to leave the patient. For the charm to work the healer must trick the patient into believing red hot metal is being applied to their back. Other charms need merely be spoken to prove effective. Some incantations mingle the pagan and the Christian freely.

All of the works in the *Carmina Gadelica* are written in their original Gaelic form, allowing us direct access to how they were originally spoken and intended. While Carmichael often kept a record of exactly who he recorded his findings from there have been those since who have accused him of meddling with, altering and polishing his work. All of his notebooks are now available online for those who wish to compare his notes with the final published works.

The wild places of Scotland were often thought to conceal witchcraft so it was unsurprising when so many enchantments were found there

Image source: Getty

Theory

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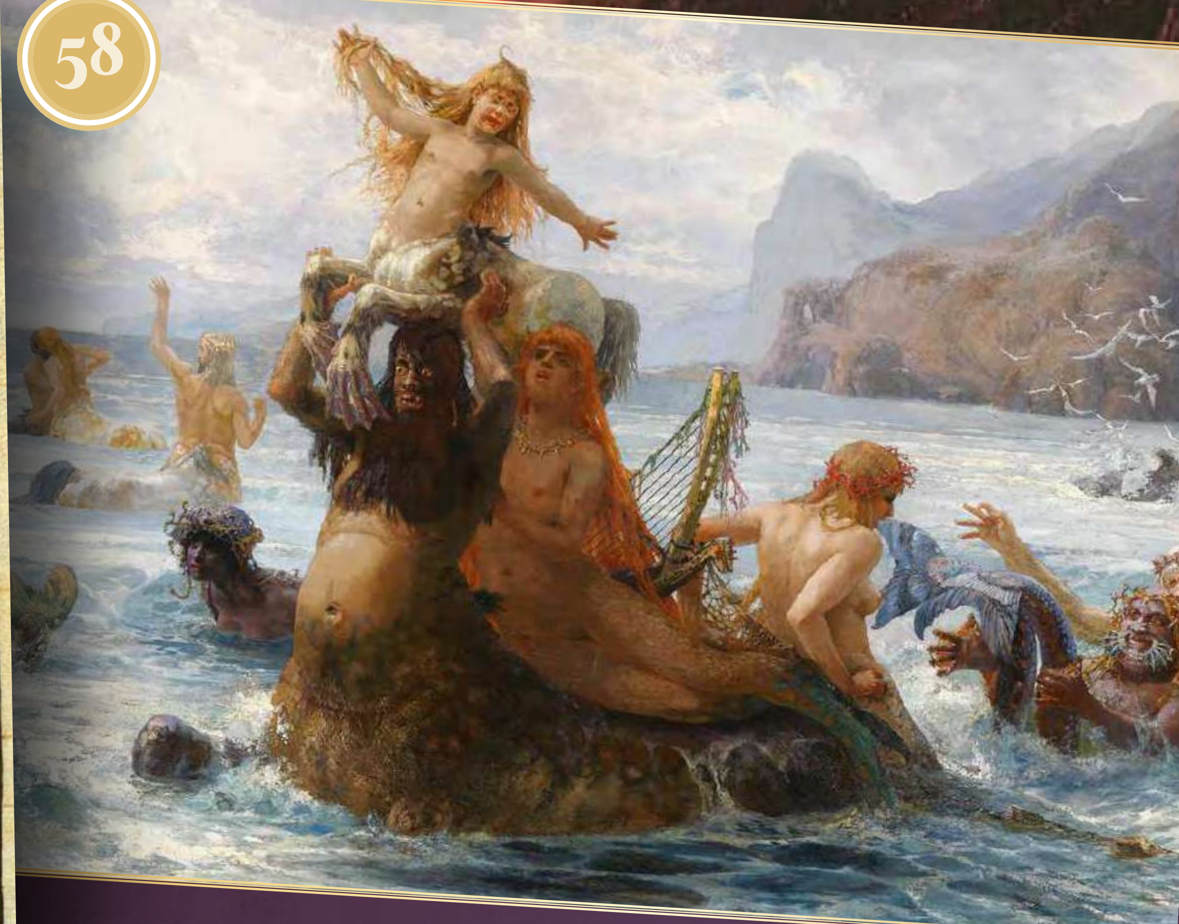
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MAKING MAGIC

Just how are spells thought to work? Find out about the use of signs, symbols, correspondences and spell words, and discover how you can use them to enhance your casting power

Written by April Madden

Practitioners of spellcraft believe that their rituals work by using a symbolic language of associations to enhance their will. They take advantage of what they believe are optimum times to cast certain spells, based on the season, the zodiac, particular festivals, the phases of the Moon, the time of day or night, and even what the weather is doing. They then use particular objects and symbols including plants, crystals, incense, candles and colours that they believe 'resonate' with certain concepts. These are called correspondences (see p70), and their use has built up over centuries across different magical traditions.

This practice is called sympathetic magic, and it works along the principle that like attracts like. For example, water is traditionally associated with washing, so it would be used in a spell for spiritually cleansing or purifying. This is a fairly obvious association, but others can be more obtuse. For centuries, ritual magicians and alchemists associated emeralds with the planet Venus. Venus rules the star sign of Taurus, so in some traditions, emerald is the Taurus birthstone. Venus is also associated with the goddess of the same name, and by extension many other goddesses of love. Thus, emeralds, Taurus, and Venus all started to be associated with the concept of romantic love. As spellcasters kept using the same associations over and over again, and appeared to achieve the results they wanted, the colour green gradually came to be associated with love spells too – not everyone can afford emeralds! People who practice sympathetic magic believe that as associations between concepts build, they grow more powerful, and that this power can be used to enhance a spell and lend it more energy than the will of the spellcaster alone. Some use the theory

There are two governing principles in sympathetic magic: the Law of Similarity and the Law of Contagion

"Sympathetic magic works along the principle that like attracts like"

Spells rely on a carefully chosen combination of symbolic ingredients, the correct timing, and appropriate words to enhance a spellcaster's power to enact their will

Image source: Getty

of 'morphic resonance' described by controversial researcher Rupert Sheldrake to explain how they think this works, others use more traditional ideas, such as the alchemical notion that certain substances and colours harmonise or resonate with certain principles, like individual musical notes linked within a chord.

> "By saying our intentions out loud we affirm them… and therefore make them real"

Some correspondences actually make scientific sense. White willow bark is often used in healing spells, particularly those for pain relief, and in beauty spells, to make the skin more attractive. Magically, white willow is associated with water, healing and beauty; those are its correspondences. Medically, however, white willow was synthesised in the 19th century into the painkiller aspirin, while cosmetically it was synthesised into salicylic acid, which is used for treating cystic acne. White willow bark's magical correspondences relate directly to its modern, mundane use, and while many people would say that's a coincidence, others would argue that either our ancestors had more pharmacological knowledge than we give them credit for, or that that's, quite simply, magic.

Some correspondences, however, make absolutely no sense at all. Wearing a pendant of weasel testicles is absolutely not a recommended form of contraception (other than it won't exactly induce an amorous mood in your partner!), but this medieval idea presumably drew from such diverse sources as the ancient Greek myth of Galanthis, a woman who was turned into a weasel for tricking the goddesses Hera and Lucina at the birth of the hero Heracles, and the association of weasels with purity due to their white winter coats and the fact that they will hunt and eat venomous snakes. Some correspondences don't always make sense; sometimes they're just a half-understood jumble of folklore and mythology.

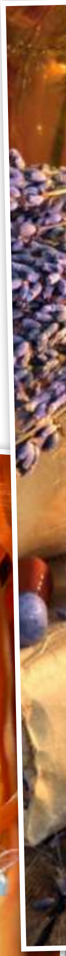
> Some researchers have linked prehistoric cave paintings of prey animals to ancient sympathetic magic rituals

When looking at correspondences from today's perspective, then, it pays to take them with a grain of salt (Salt is incredibly important in spellcraft). The table of correspondences on p70 is designed for safe use today, but in the past, practitioners of magic have used dangerous and even deadly substances, like aconite, belladonna and mercury, in their spells. Please do not do this! If it's not something you can safely put on your living room table, it's not suitable for getting started with spellcraft. Going back to the correspondences associated with love spells, there are a wide range of plants available for use in this context. It's much better to use sweet, edible apricot, for example, than it is toxic, hallucinogenic jimsonweed. Even though both of them technically correspond to Venus, Taurus, emerald green, and therefore love, common sense dictates that when trying to attract a lover, you're going to get a much better result from a plant that's pleasant as opposed to one that's poisonous. Some practitioners instead follow what they call 'the Poison Path' and work almost exclusively with noxious plants such as hellebore; these practitioners are usually expert gardeners alongside their magical practise and know the risk-management measures they need to take in order to keep themselves, and others, safe. If you don't know what something in a table of correspondences is, look it up and make sure that it's safe for you to use. Bear in mind that if you, or someone you're casting for, has any allergies, you'll need to factor those in too.

You don't need to raid a chemistry set or harm a living creature to gather a suitable collection of items that can be used to invoke magical

A collection of ribbons can be an exceptionally useful tool for any spellcaster, as different colours can be tied to other objects or woven together to invoke multiple levels of correspondence

Image source: Lainey Powell, CC BY-SA 2.0



The Law of Contagion

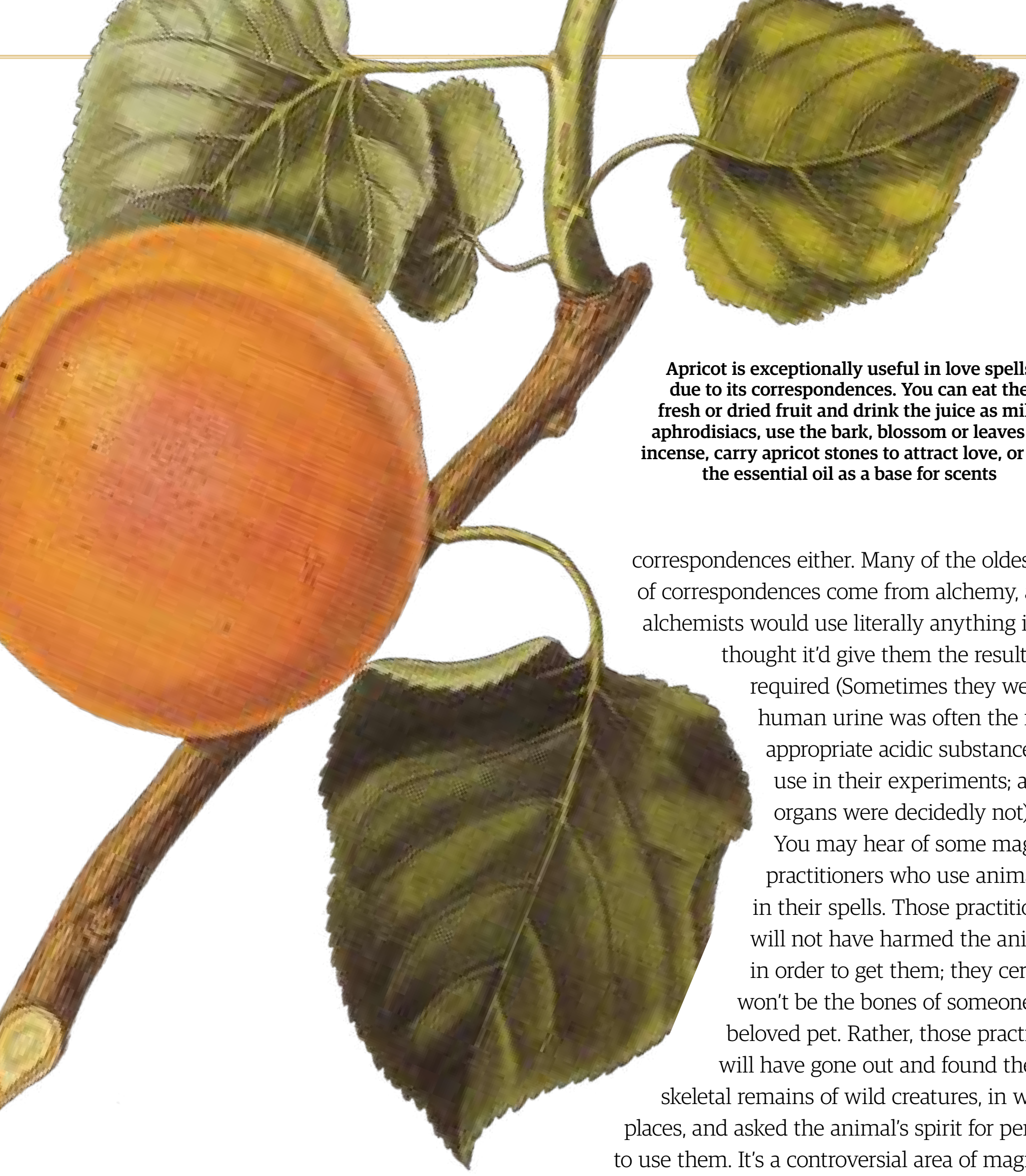
Magical theory is full of laws –"As above, so below," from the Emerald Tablet (see p32) describes similarities between all planes of existence and therefore how magical practices can affect all of them; the Rule of Three (a reconstructed Wiccan interpretation of a dharmic idea rooted in Hinduism) states that whatever intentions we put out into the world, positive or negative, we recoup threefold (making it a salient warning regarding good behaviour!). The Law of Contagion, despite its viral name, can be an incredibly powerful concept to work with. A facet of sympathetic magic, it states that people, or objects, or both, who have once been in contact are then magically linked. It's behind beliefs as diverse as saints' relics, voodoo dolls, wedding rings, and keeping a lover's hair in a locket.

The link between the people, or objects, is believed to persist until it is ritually banished or purified, and for various reasons the practitioner may want to do this and deliberately sever the association, or deliberately maintain and even 'refuel' it every so often by magical means instead, as like all things it can fade with time.

Working with the Law of Contagion requires practitioners to behave responsibly – it is absolutely not about exerting control over someone else. A more beneficent use of it is to incorporate an item, usually jewellery, into a general spell of protection for a loved one.

Beads are a handy magical tool. Rosaries and mala beads are used in meditative practices, and making an item of beaded jewellery for someone affirms a connection with them and is particularly good as a protective charm

Image source: Getty



Apricot is exceptionally useful in love spells due to its correspondences. You can eat the fresh or dried fruit and drink the juice as mild aphrodisiacs, use the bark, blossom or leaves as incense, carry apricot stones to attract love, or use the essential oil as a base for scents

correspondences either. Many of the oldest tables of correspondences come from alchemy, and alchemists would use literally anything if they thought it'd give them the result they required (Sometimes they were right: human urine was often the most appropriate acidic substance to use in their experiments; animal organs were decidedly not).

You may hear of some magical practitioners who use animal bones in their spells. Those practitioners will not have harmed the animal in order to get them; they certainly won't be the bones of someone's beloved pet. Rather, those practitioners will have gone out and found the skeletal remains of wild creatures, in wild places, and asked the animal's spirit for permission to use them. It's a controversial area of magic and not one that's recommended for newcomers to spellcraft, but if you feel you absolutely must have some kind of bone for the spell you're doing, take the wishbone from your Sunday roast and clean it thoroughly, or go to your local rock shop and buy a fossil that can be used again and again.

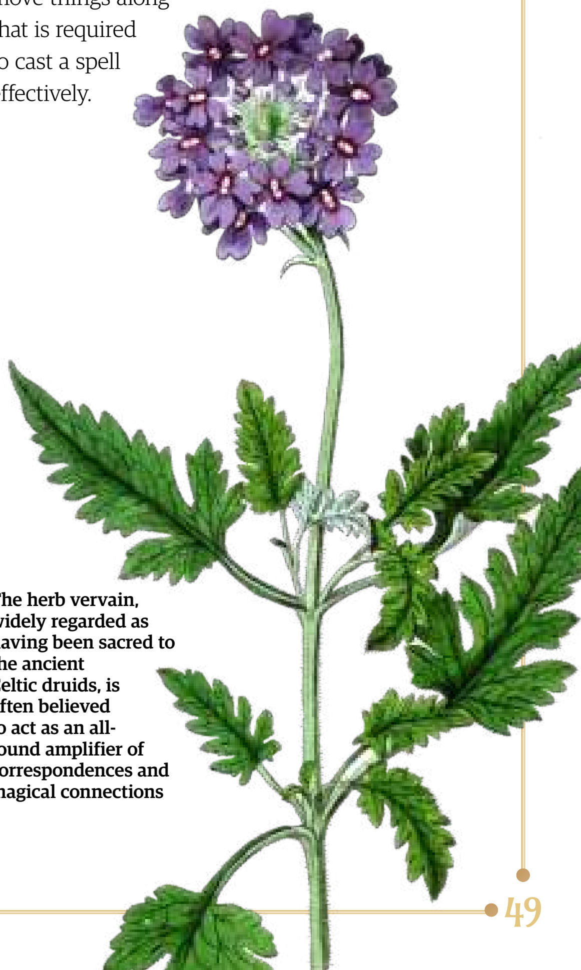
One really effective tool for spellcraft can be ribbons. They're available in a huge range of colours, meaning you can find one that will correspond to anything. You can tie them around other objects, so it doesn't matter if you don't have a green candle for a love spell - you can tie a green ribbon around an ordinary white household candle instead (being careful that it's nowhere near the flame, of course). You can press them into molten wax to seal jars and envelopes, you can train growing plants into shape with them, you can tuck a ribbon charm unobtrusively into a pocket or wear it as a bracelet to carry with you all the time, you can decorate altars and ritual spaces with them. As you become a more confident user of correspondences, you can plait or weave two or more colours together, adding more complex resonances to your spells.

Spell words work in a similar way to correspondences. Some ancient, nonsensical-sounding spell words - known in ancient Greek-ruled Egypt as 'barbarous names' - are believed to have power just because they somehow *do* - either tonally (by using the correct notes), linguistically (by tapping into ancient languages), or resonantly (because they've built up extra power through repeated use). At its simplest, however, spoken magic is believed to work because by saying our intentions out loud, preferably in a pretty, poetic form, we affirm them, put them out into the world, and therefore make them real. We think of the word 'enchantment' as meaning a shift into a beguiling, magical reality: if we're enchanted by something or someone then we're captivated into a dreamlike state, but the word literally means to chant something, to say it aloud rhythmically. When we enchant something we cast a spell on it. Another term for spell words is an 'incantation' -- the Latin root of this word means the same thing. In Old Norse, meanwhile, 'galdr' describes spoken or sung magic; the English word 'nightingale' draws from it, literally meaning 'night spell' in reference to the bird's beautiful song.

When we combine spell words with ingredients that have been chosen because of their correspondences, what we have is a customised recipe for success that allows us to amplify and enhance the strength of our will. Whether the words and objects themselves are inherently magical or whether they simply, symbolically tune in to and enhance the practitioner's personal power is a matter of individual belief, but ultimately it is belief - with a few handy boosts to move things along - that is required to cast a spell effectively.

Image source: Getty

Spell ingredients can include fresh and dried plants, candles of assorted colours, crystals, symbolic designs and much more. Use a table of correspondence to find those that resonate with the issues you plan to work with



The herb vervain, widely regarded as having been sacred to the ancient Celtic druids, is often believed to act as an all-round amplifier of correspondences and magical connections

THE FOUR ELEMENTS

Spellcraft's division of all things into fundamental elements is an ancient and influential idea

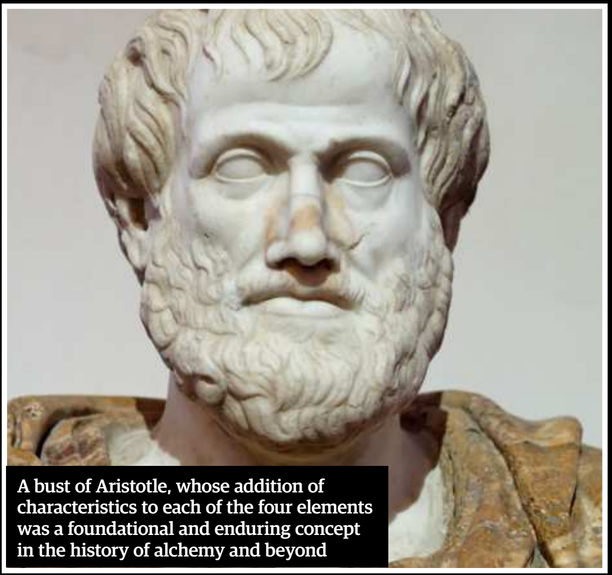
Written by Paul Walker-Emig

Earth, air, water, fire: almost everyone is familiar with this quartet of elements. It it testament to the power of the concept of the four elements that this idea, established back in antiquity, is still deeply embedded in modern culture.

The concept of fundamental elements existed in many philosophical and proto-scientific cultures, in particular, ancient Greece. The philosopher Empedocles laid down his doctrine of the four elements in around 450 BCE, arguing that all matter is comprised from these four roots. Aristotle would later expand on his work, attributing qualities of hotness and dryness to each element. Air, he argued, is hot and wet, fire is hot and dry, water is cold and wet and earth is cold and dry. Later, the alchemists adopted this idea, and that's how it found its way into modern spellcraft today.

> Wiccan theory adds a magical fifth element, known variously as Spirit, Aether, or Akasha

It is important to understand that the ancient Greeks, and many of the alchemists who developed their ideas, did not think about the four elements in the way that we now view elements like lead or hydrogen, through the prism of chemistry. The four elements tended to describe the quality of things, rather than the thing itself. In addition, the idea was not always meant to be taken literally. The concept often had a strong philosophical, allegorical or psychological component and was employed as such throughout the history of alchemy. However, alchemists would also develop more literal and mystical interpretations of the concept, and those made their way into modern magic too.



A bust of Aristotle, whose addition of characteristics to each of the four elements was a foundational and enduring concept in the history of alchemy and beyond

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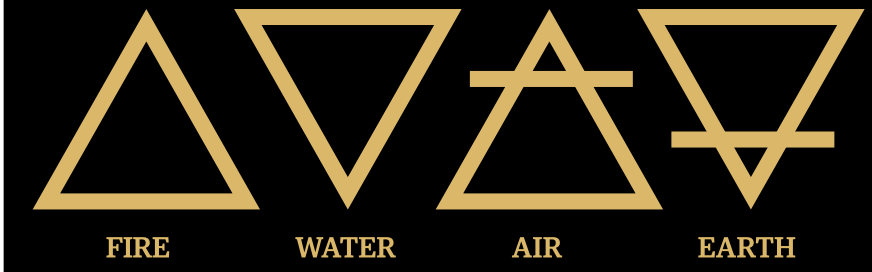
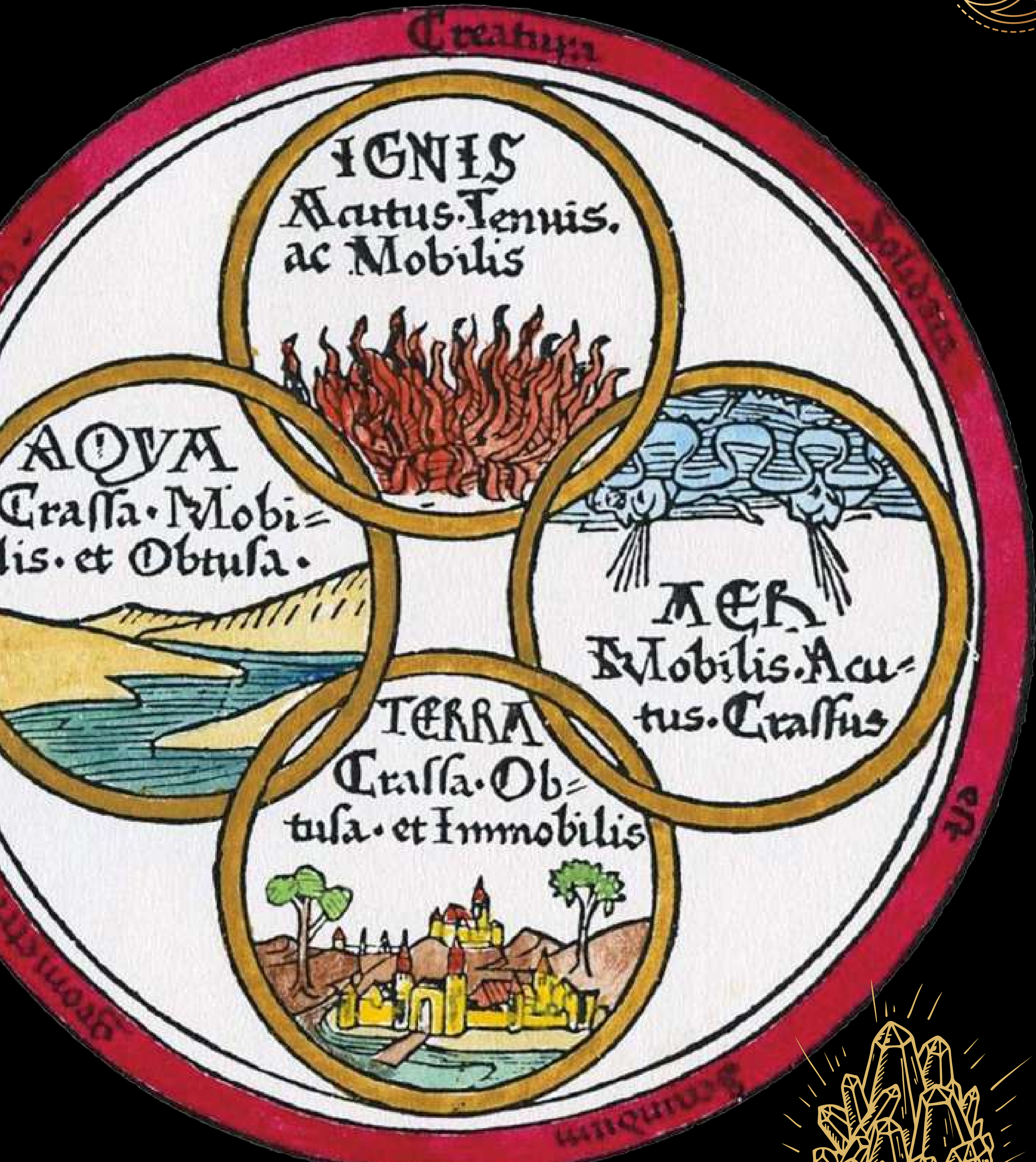
The influential Islamic alchemist Jabir ibn Hayyan speculated that each metal displayed two of Aristotle's qualities externally and two internally – lead was externally cold and dry and gold hot and moist, for example. Therefore, just as it is possible to turn water into air by adding heat, substituting the quality of coldness for hotness, Jabir theorised it would be possible to change one metal into another by rearranging its elemental properties. This necessarily influenced Jabir's interest in laboratorial experimentation as a means to find ways of manipulating elemental properties, and, by extension, the alchemical tradition to follow, on which his thought and practice had a huge impact.

This idea of the four elements as foundational, irreducible components from which the universe was made remained prominent in European medieval alchemy. However, during this period the four elements also took on strong spiritual connotations. In the 13th century, alchemists commonly believed that once they had discovered a way of manipulating metals they could apply those processes to purifying the human soul and reuniting it with the divine.



The alchemical symbols for the four elements, representing, from left to right, fire, water, air and earth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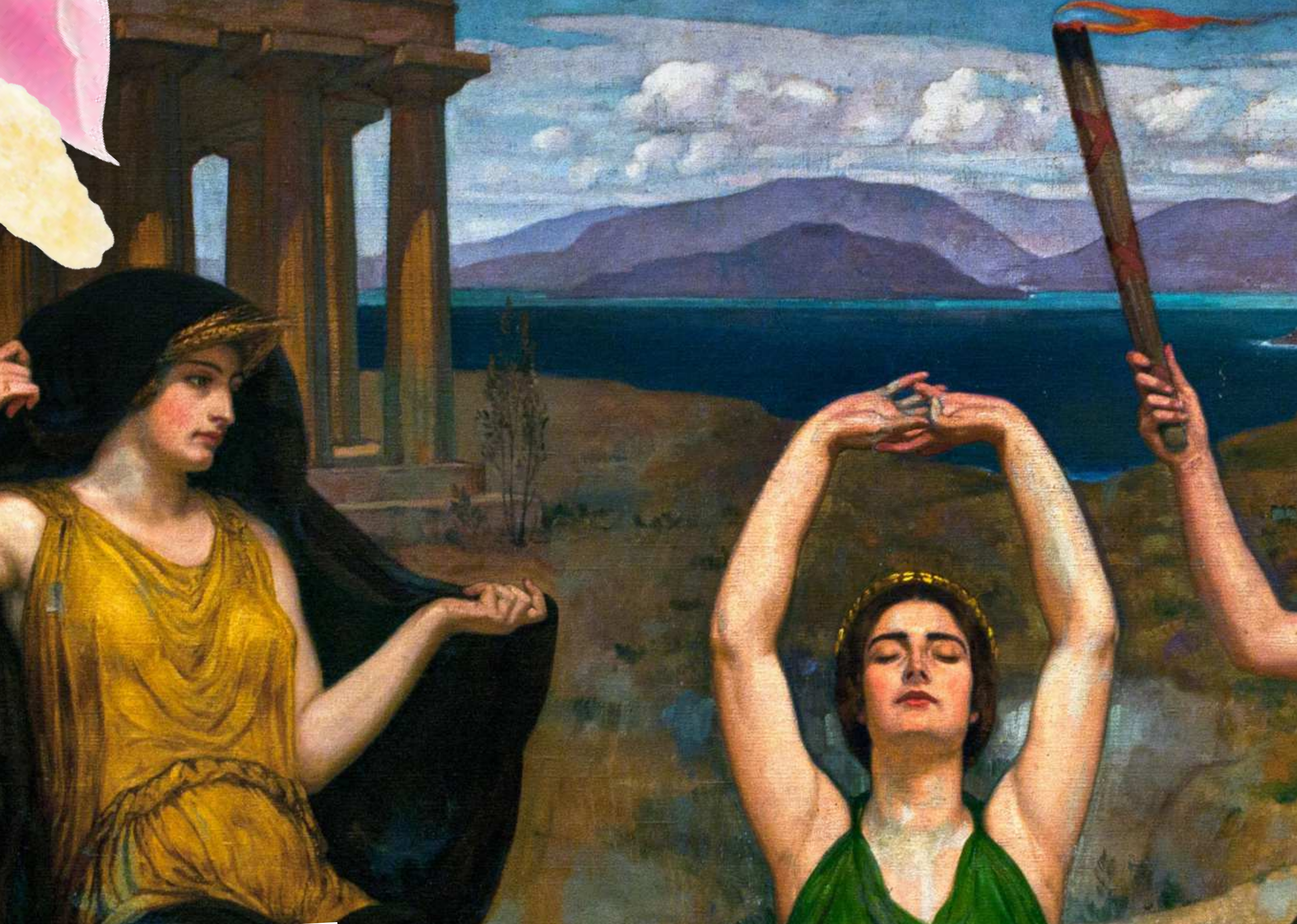
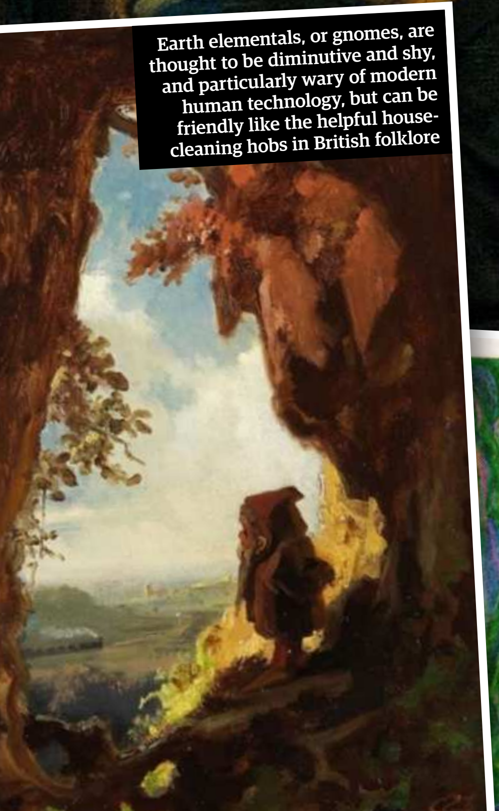
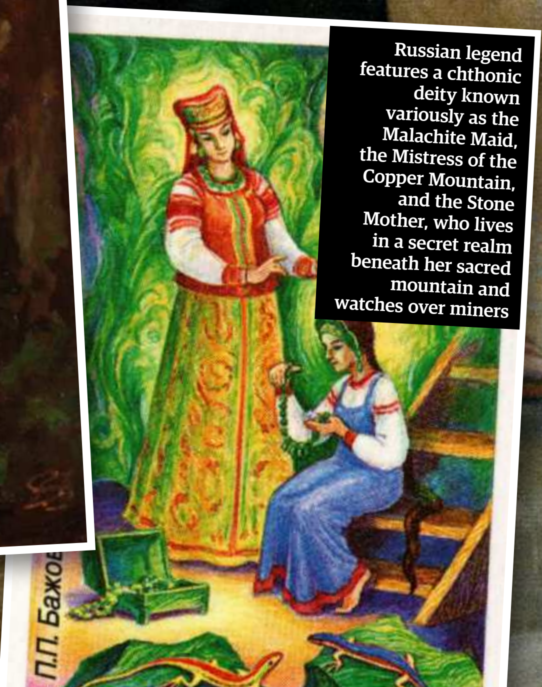




Earth elementals, or gnomes, are thought to be diminutive and shy, and particularly wary of modern human technology, but can be friendly like the helpful house-cleaning hobs in British folklore



Russian legend features a chthonic deity known variously as the Malachite Maid, the Mistress of the Copper Mountain, and the Stone Mother, who lives in a secret realm beneath her sacred mountain and watches over miners

THE LORE OF EARTH

Earth is the source of growth, nature and life, but also the domain of darkness, stillness and death

Written by April Madden

Earth is the first of the four traditional cardinal elements, associated with the north and with all that is material and physical. It is terrestrial and practical – quite literally 'down to earth' – but that doesn't mean that it's without its mysteries. Earth holds within itself both the promise of life and the certainty of death. It's both spring growth, first fruit and harvest, and winter cold, barrenness and mortal remains. This duality is often symbolised by the union of Persephone, goddess of spring, with Hades, the god of the underworld, in Greek myth. Deities that are associated with earth are often called chthonic – the word literally means subterranean or underground, but is used to particularly describe deities that relate to the underworld. Even the most above-ground vegetation god, though, quite literally has roots in the underworld, like Dionysus, Greek god of wine, who is frequently depicted as moving in and out of the underworld at will to visit friends and family both mortal and divine.

Duality abounds in the nature of earth. The alchemists thought of it as cold and dry; prior to Isaac Newton's theories on gravity it was thought that things fell towards the ground when dropped because they were 'earth-laden'. It was associated with the season of autumn and with melancholy. Yet it is also the root of material wealth, in the shape of metals and gemstones, hence Hades' alternate name, Plouton (later Roman Pluto), meaning 'wealthy'. It's the realm of death, yet out of the darkness grow seeds and bulbs, fruit and crops, so earth is often conceptualised as a nurturing mother. In spellcraft, earth is symbolised by salt.

The 16th century Swiss alchemist Paracelsus introduced the idea of gnomes as earth elementals (he may have made a spelling mistake, intending to write 'gēnomos', Latin for 'earth-dweller'). Paracelsus was the first to apply the name, but he wrote that the creatures themselves were already well known in legend. He described them as around two feet high, shy of humans, living within their own underground societies, and able to move through and breathe earth in the same way that humans breathe air. Paracelsus' mine-dwelling mountain people are closely related to many diminutive earthy creatures of myth and folklore, from Scandinavian dark elves and dwarves to *Peer Gynt*'s troll maidens and Old Man of the Mountains, British brownies and hobs, and the garden gnomes that still flock around rockeries and ponds to this day.

> Earth is often conceptualised as a goddess: Gaia, Mother Earth, or Mother Nature are common personifications

> "Even the most above-ground vegetation god has roots in the underworld"

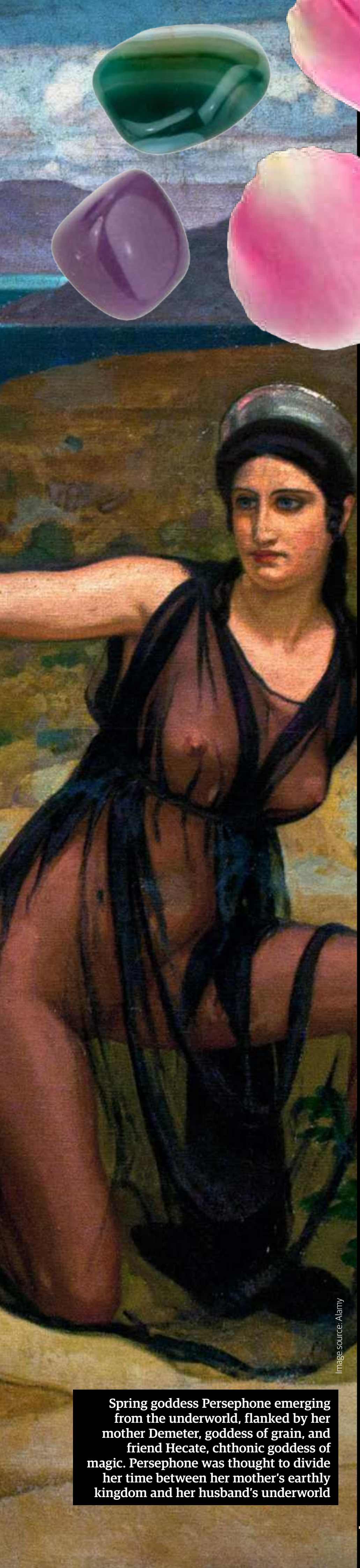

Spring goddess Persephone emerging from the underworld, flanked by her mother Demeter, goddess of grain, and friend Hecate, chthonic goddess of magic. Persephone was thought to divide her time between her mother's earthly kingdom and her husband's underworld

Image source: Alamy

THE LORE OF AIR

Air is symbolised by the wind and the starry sky, representing mind, intellect and lightness of being

Written by April Madden

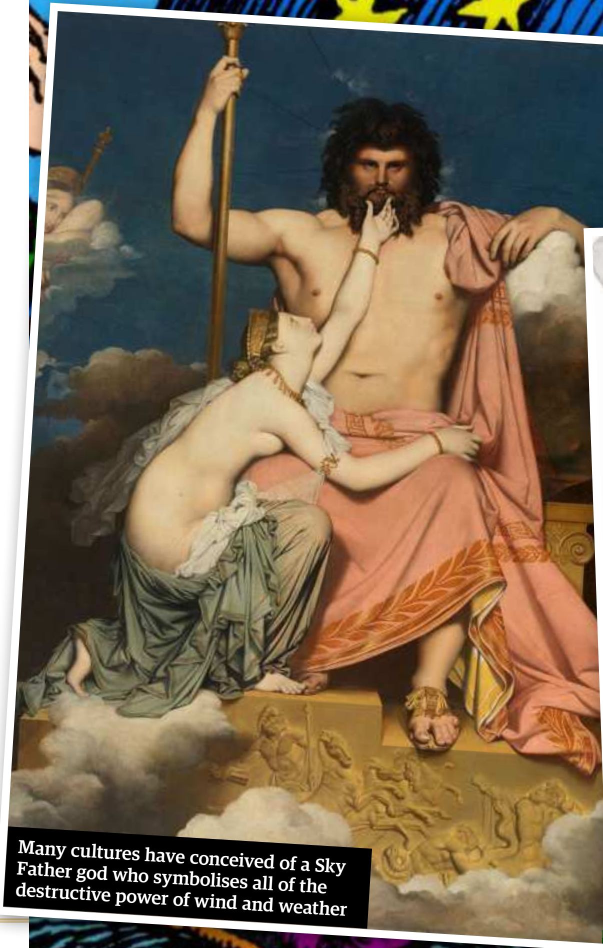
Air is the second of the cardinal elements, and in modern Western systems of magic based on the teachings of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, it's associated with the East, with the rising sun, the morning breeze and everything that is light and airy. The ancient Greeks conceptualised air in two ways: aer, the lower atmosphere that can be obfuscated with rain, cloud, fog and smoke, and the aether, the bright sparkling firmament above the clouds. Today, the word aether is sometimes associated with spirit instead, the abstract conception of a fifth element as expressed by the five-pointed symbol of the pentagram. This speaks to an essential quality of the element of air: mutability. As a mutable element, air is changeable and unpredictable, even erratic, and this links it to the nature of both the intellect and the soul, which it often symbolises.

> The ancients thought of the upper air, or aether, as a set of rotating celestial spheres jewelled with stars

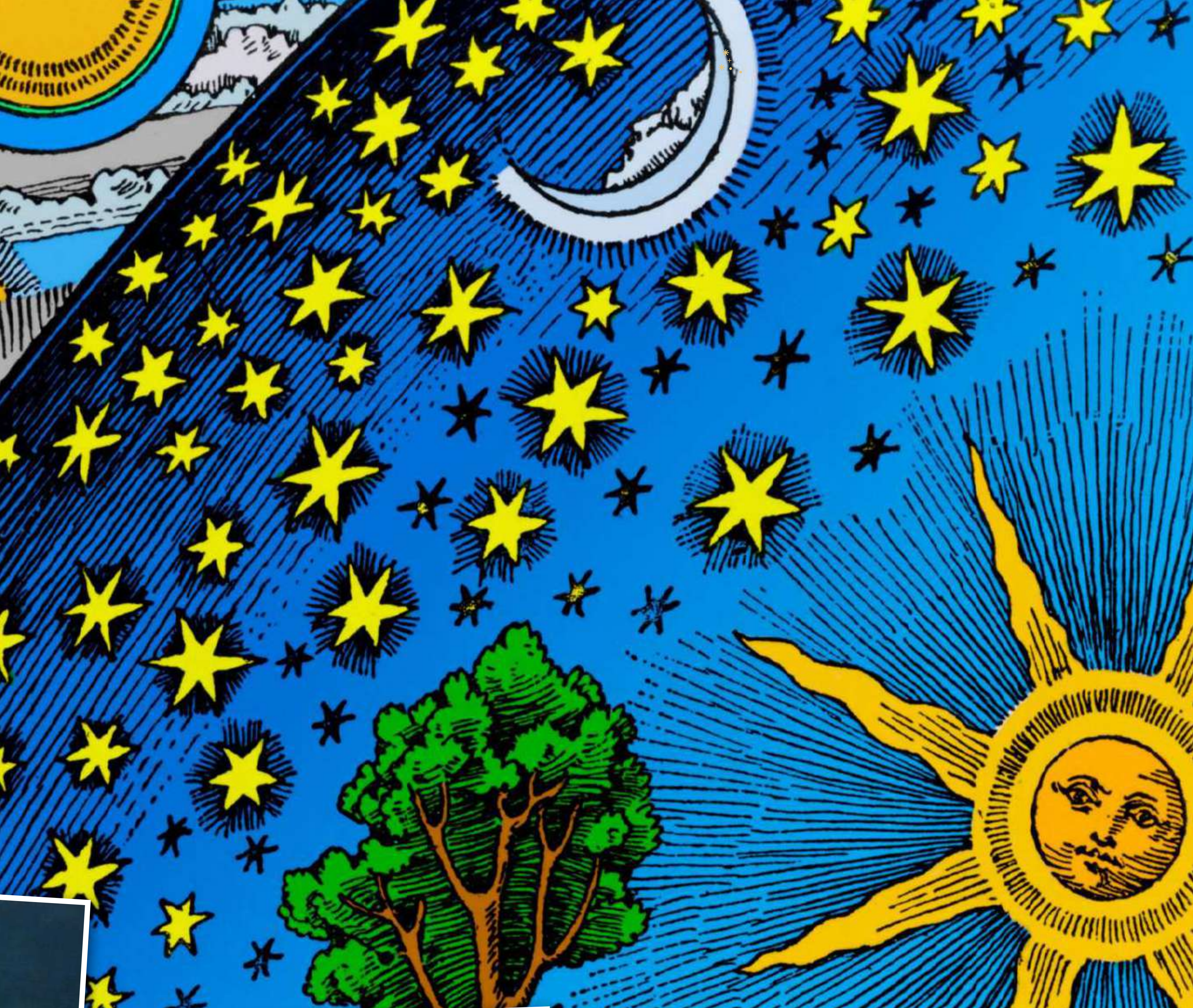
Air is often invoked with incenses that can drift on its currents. In ancient Greek thought aer was associated with heat and moisture (think of a warm, rainy summer wind) and with the cheerful, friendly, sanguine personality type. By contrast, the aether was thought of as heavenly, unchanging, divine; the lofty blue home of the stars and planets. Like earth, air encompasses duality. In Sumerian myth, Enlil, lord of air, is the greatest of the gods, because he separated his mother and father, Earth and Sky, allowing the other gods to be born, and spoke the word that brought the world of light into being. His wife is Ninlil, once a grain-seed goddess; their union is theorised to provide an origin myth for wind pollination. Air gods often rise to the top of pantheons even when they're not associated with wind: Greek Zeus and Roman Jupiter both have their roots in the Proto-Indo-European Dyaus Pitr or Sky Father, a thunder god. Gods of wind, air and storm aren't exclusively male though: the Chinese goddess Leizi makes bolts of lightning using mirrors, Greek Hera is the goddess of air, Egyptian Nut is the goddess of the sky.

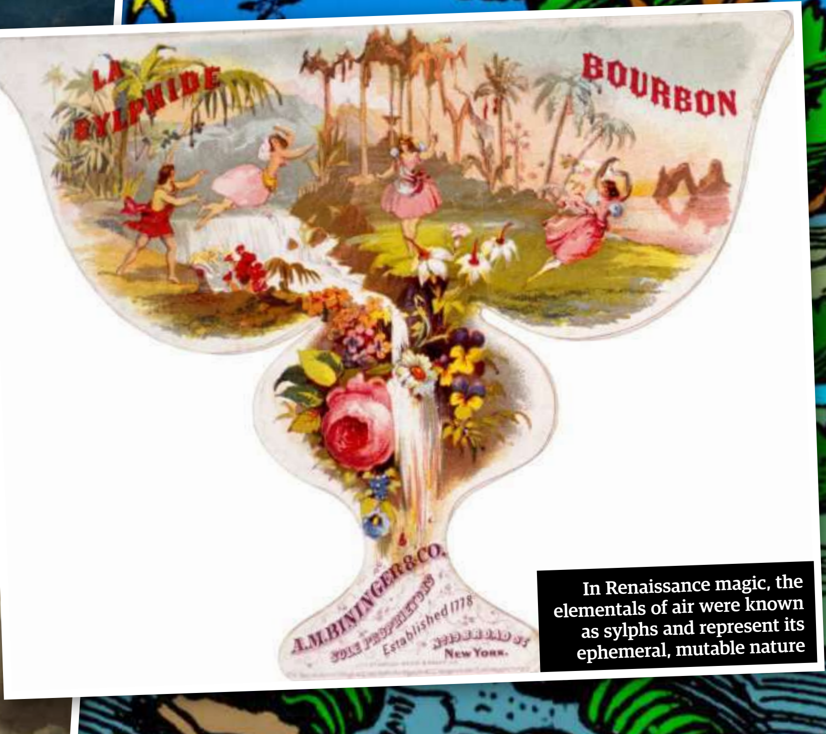
According to Paracelsus, the elementals of air are known as sylphs, a word that may derive from the Latin word for trees or the Greek word for moth, or from a portmanteau that came to mean 'nymph' . These sylphs are thought to resemble the classic Victorian fairy archetype: ephemeral, gauzy, butterfly-winged and insubstantial - but as air's sometimes stormy nature can attest, being light and floaty doesn't always mean being gentle.

> "Air gods often rise to the top of pantheons even when they're not associated with wind"



Many cultures have conceived of a Sky Father god who symbolises all of the destructive power of wind and weather




LA SYLPHIDE
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In Renaissance magic, the elementals of air were known as sylphs and represent its ephemeral, mutable nature

The ancient Greeks split the concept of air into two spheres: the lower atmosphere of weather, called aer, and the celestial firmament above, called the aether

THE LORE OF FIRE

The element of fire is a double-edged sword: warm and nourishing when contained, but also rampant and deadly when it runs wild

Written by April Madden

Fire is the element that, in ancient beliefs, differentiated human from animal. Earth, air and water exist all around us, we move on and through them constantly. They're even part of our bodies - air and water very obviously, earth in the shape of the calcium, an alkaline earth metal, that forms our bones. In very ancient times, fire was wild, the product of volcanoes, lightning strikes, or unusual levels of aridity. Our capture and later, independent creation of fire, is such an important, transformative part of human history that many cultures have myths that relate to it.

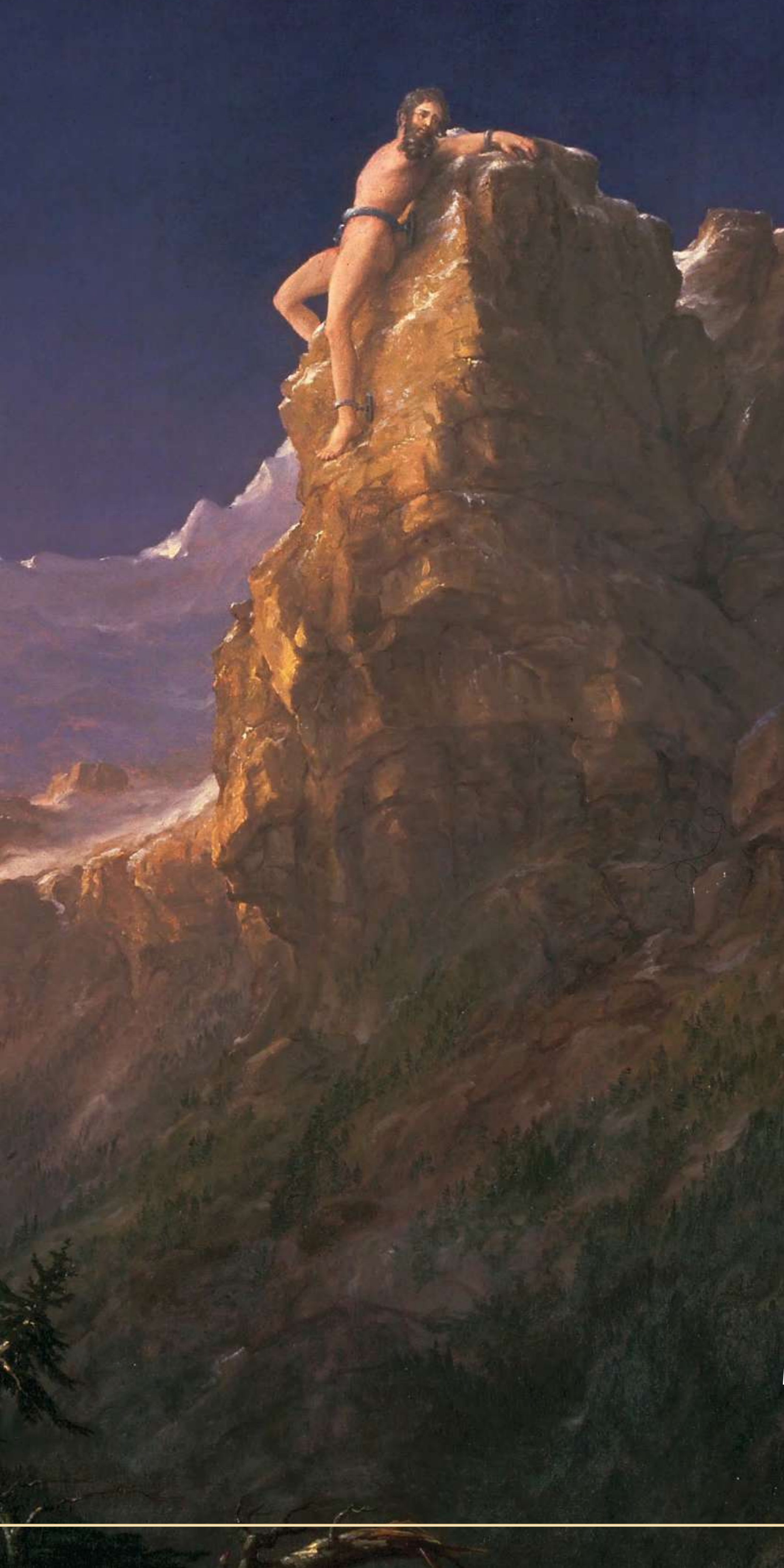
Many religions of the ancient world featured sacred fires - Zoroastrianism and Roman paganism are key examples. The Romans believed in a goddess of hearthfire, Vesta, whose sacred temple flame was never allowed to go out. This may well be a survival of a more practical proscription: if your only source of fire is wildfire, because you cannot yet make it yourself, then it makes sense to nurture and feed it - it's your key indoor source of heat, light, and cooked food.

Many other myths from around the world feature the 'theft of fire' motif - an entity steals fire from the gods, who may have deliberately hidden it, and gives it to humanity. In Greek myth this is the titan Prometheus, in the Hindu Rigveda a similar figure is Mātariśvan. Native American and First Nations myths credit a range of different animal archetypes with the theft of fire, depending on which tribe is telling the story; common fire-thieves include Rabbit, Crow, and Grandmother Spider. In the *Book of Enoch*, the fallen angel Azazel is the one who gives fire to humanity; in Norse mythology, the god Loki learns the trick of making fire from the shapeshifting giant Þjazi (Thiassi) when he meets him in eagle-form. Most fire-thief deities are tricksters, reflecting the nature of fire itself: homely, nurturing and warm, but also chaotic, rapacious, and deadly. Unlike the other elements, nothing can live in fire, although the occultist Paracelsus believed that salamanders could and did, and this belief has permeated esoteric traditions to the extent that the theoretical elementals of fire are known as salamanders to this day.

> In alchemical thought fire symbolises desire - not just physical attraction, but the force of the will to succeed

Fire represents strength, power, passion, energy, light, heat, and civilisation, thanks to the enormous impact its harnessing had on human culture. The act of summoning fire by striking sparks from flint and using them to light tinder may well have been the first real magic spell our ancestors ever performed.

Image source: Wiki



In Greek myth, the titan Prometheus is punished for giving fire to humanity, until he is finally freed by the hero Heracles

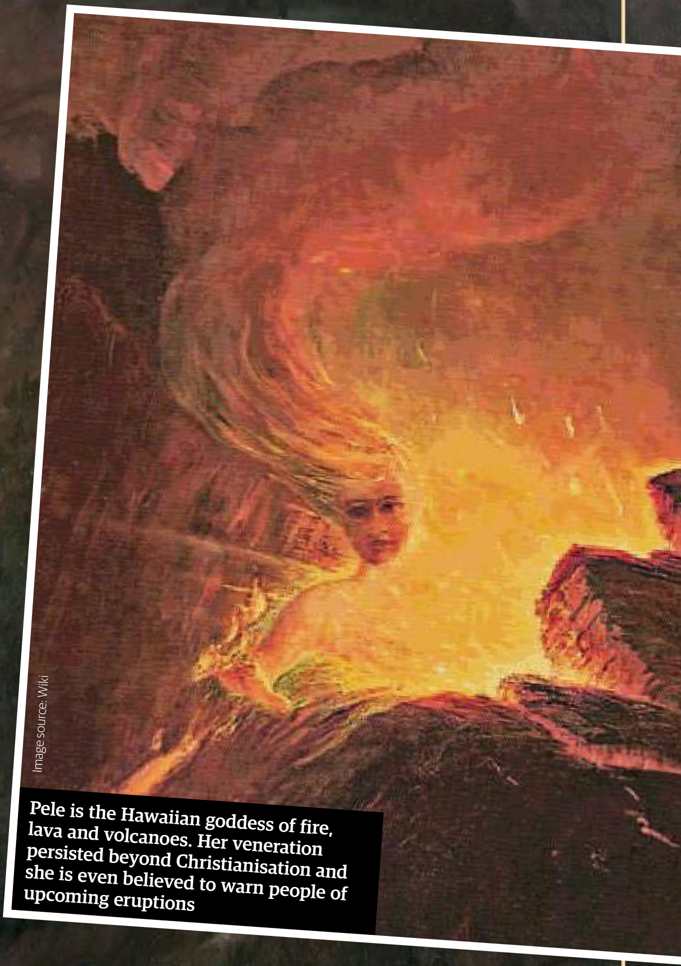


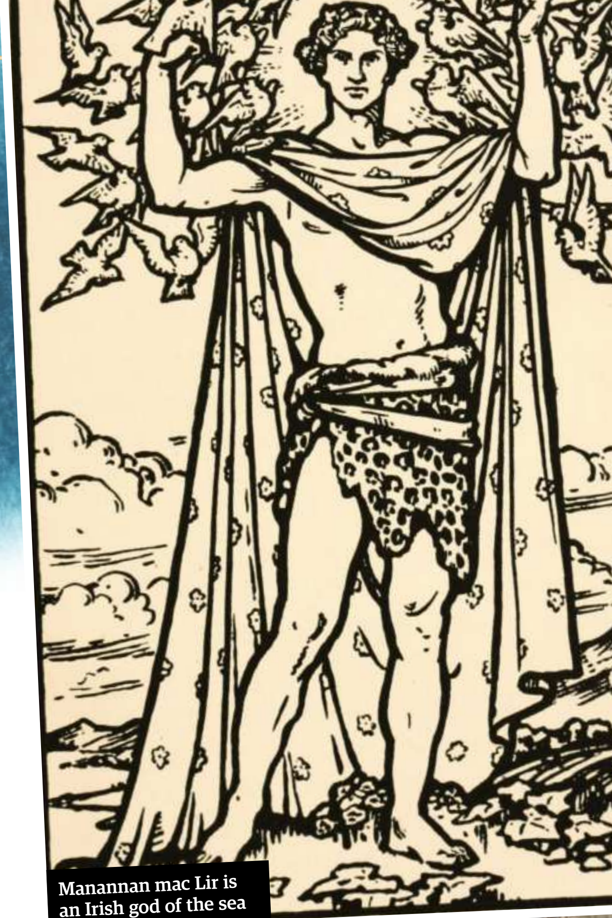
Image source: Wiki

Pele is the Hawaiian goddess of fire, lava and volcanoes. Her veneration persisted beyond Christianisation and she is even believed to warn people of upcoming eruptions

THE LORE OF WATER

Water is a symbol of life, cleansing and healing, but many stories tell of terrifying sea creatures wreaking havoc on the innocent

Written by Rebecca Greig



Manannan mac Lir is an Irish god of the sea

Water is one of the most vital of the cardinal elements. It is needed to support life and is used for healing, cleansing and purification.

Folklore about water spirits can be found in many cultures. A Greek water spirit known as the naiad is said to preside over a spring or stream. The Romans believed in camenae, who were similar to the Greek spirits, while many other cultures had their own deity associated with water; Gong Gong, Llyr, Manannan mac Lir, Njord, Neptune, and Namaka just to name a few.

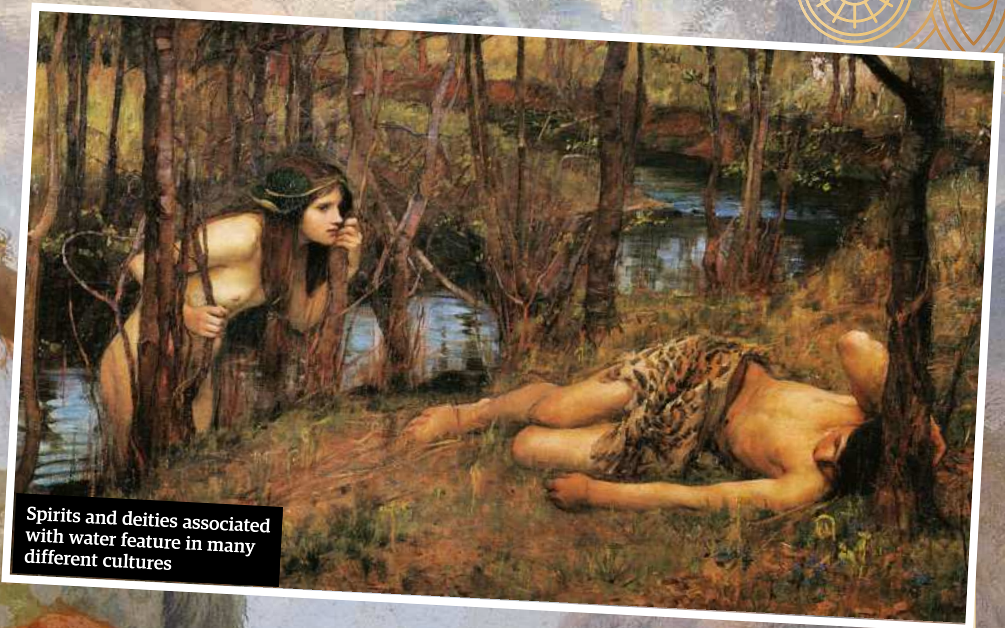
According to British folklore many streams and wells were host to water spirits, and it became a popular custom to toss a bit of silver into a sacred body of water as a type of offering to the god or goddess believed to reside there.

The islands off the coast of mainland Scotland are home to a number of magical myths about the sea. The blue men of Minch are said to be supernatural sea creatures that lived in underwater caves in the Minch, which is situated between Lewis and the Shiant Islands near Scotland. The blue human-like creatures were known for swimming beside passing ships, and trying to destroy them by causing storms and by luring sailors into the water. In order to save his ship, the captain would have to solve their riddles.

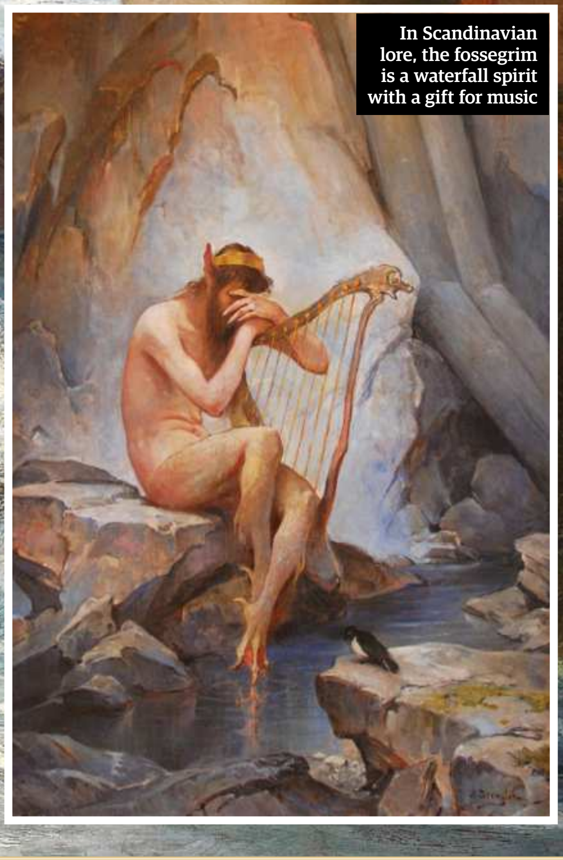
In Celtic folklore, a water horse called a kelpie haunts the shores and rivers of Scotland and Ireland. In Scandinavian folklore there is a similar horse-like creature known as Bäckahästen. The stories say that the brook horse would appear in rivers during foggy weather. Those that chose to ride her would never be able to get off and she'd jump into the water and drown them.

They sound like something from the pages of *Harry Potter* (and are) but grindylows (or grundylows) originally appear in British folktales based in Yorkshire. Parents would tell their children of these long-fingered monsters, who would drag children deep underwater and drown them, in that hope that it would deter them from playing in or near the cold waters in the area.

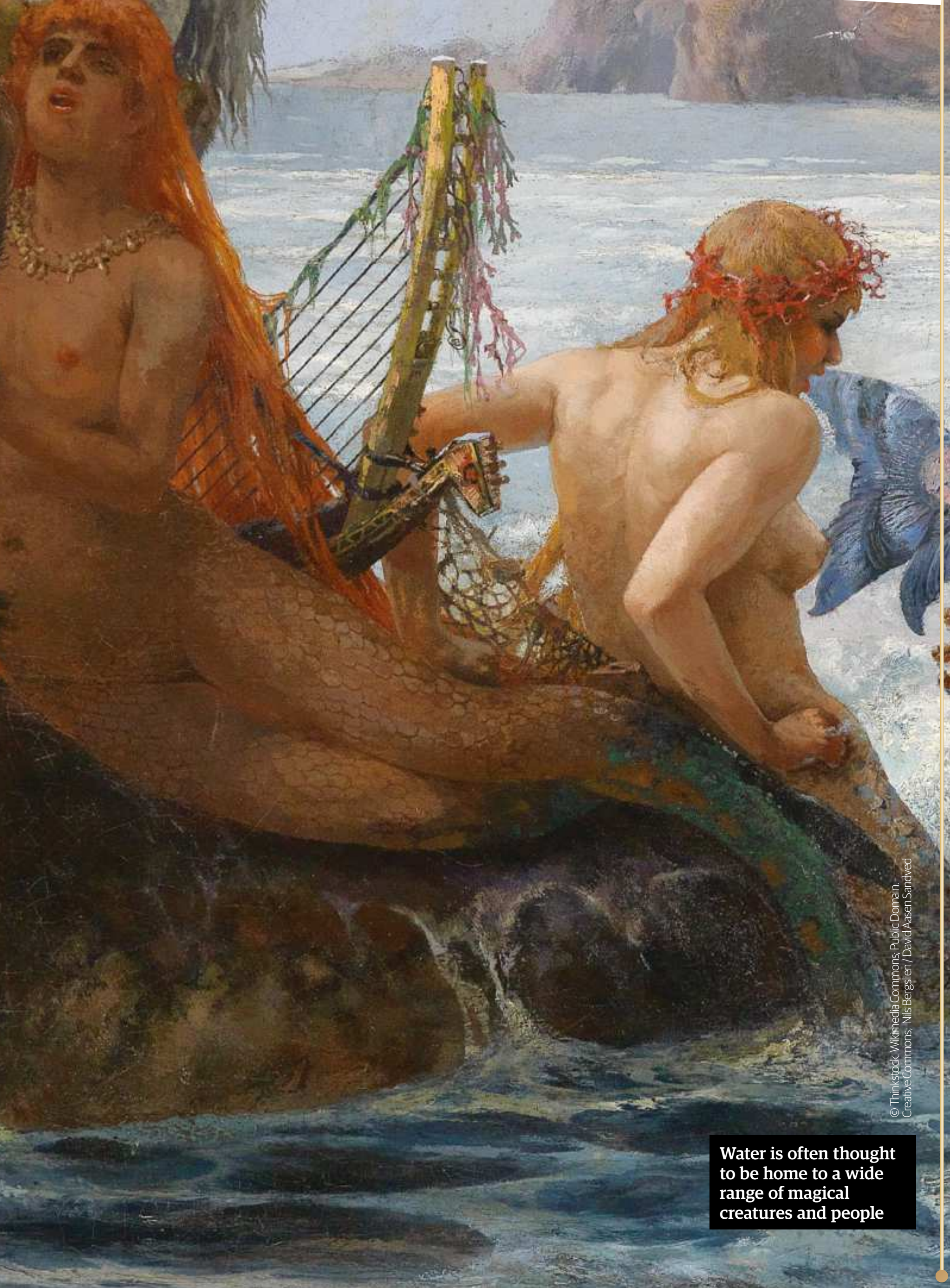
An amusing English adage says that a woman who splashes too much water around while doing the laundry or dishes will be cursed with a husband who drinks to excess. And spilling water from a bucket on the way back from a well or spring is sure to bring misfortune.



Spirits and deities associated with water feature in many different cultures



In Scandinavian lore, the fossegrim is a waterfall spirit with a gift for music



Water is often thought to be home to a wide range of magical creatures and people

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THE MAGIC OF THE STARS

Astrology can have an incredibly deep impact on spellcraft, from choosing the best time to cast a spell to empowering a talisman with heavenly strength

Written by April Madden

The zodiac can be a powerful tool in spellcasting. Not only does it give us a quick reference to the dominant energy in any particular month, as each sign is associated with one of the four cardinal elements, it can be used in more depth to plan the best time to perform a spell that's personalised to the caster or the person they're casting for (or on) or to add extra power to a spell.

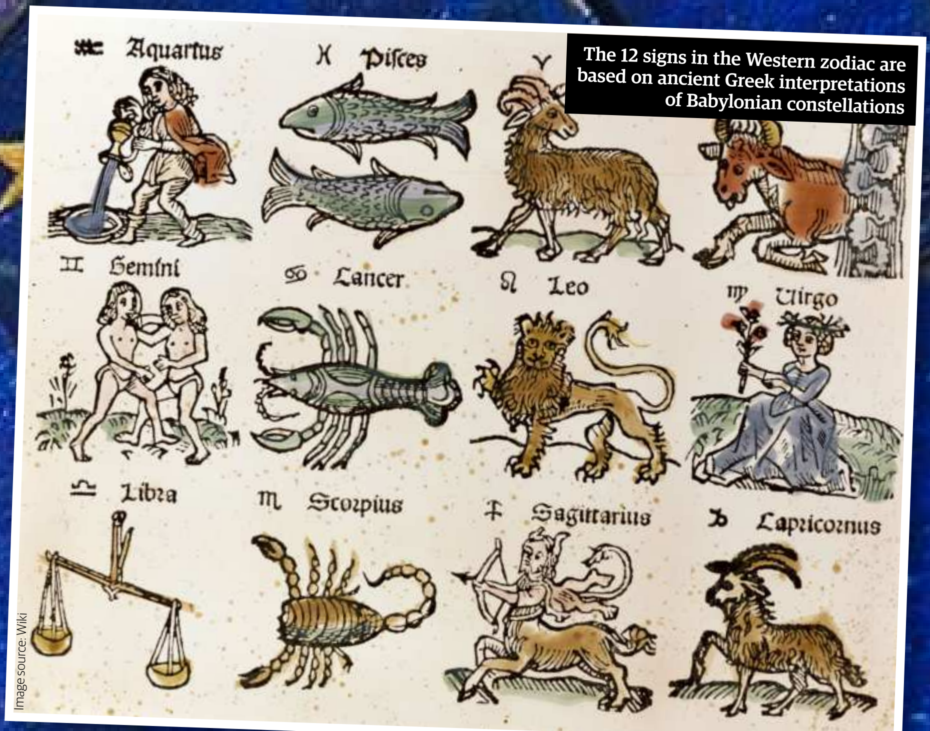
Western astrology isn't as complicated as its Chinese and Indian cousins, which use different zodiac signs and complex mathematical formulae to calculate optimum dates for things like marriages, exams and celebrations. Hindu astrology in particular can be so personally tailored that it can even select a custom 'seed mantra' for use in meditation depending on the day, time and location in which you were born.

Western astrology, based on Babylonian, ancient Greek and Arabic theories, is nonetheless both a powerful tool and a steep learning curve. Happily, today you don't have to have detailed knowledge of the heavens to work out a complete natal (birth) chart - all you need is the date, time and place of a birth. Plug these into a site like cafeastrology.com and you'll get a complete horoscope of where the Sun, Moon and planets were at the time of the birth.

> Useful astrological information to know for spells includes your Sun sign, Moon sign, and ascendant, or rising sign

Most people already know what their main 'star sign', or rather, Sun sign, is - in Western astrology it's the constellation that the Sun was in at the time of our birth. We're all familiar with the basic personality traits that are associated with our Sun sign, but there are other astrological factors that can be brought into play in spellcraft. Behenian stars are a group of 15 'fixed' stars believed to lend extra power to certain planets, symbols, gemstones and plants. Some practitioners believe that their powers can be drawn into talismans at particular times to provide blessings such as peace and luck.

Moon signs - the sign the Moon was in when someone was born - are particularly useful in spellcraft. A good way to personalise a spell for someone is to find out when the Moon will be in their Moon sign. If you can extrapolate this further and find a time when the Moon is in both the right zodiac sign and the correct Moon phase for your intended spell, you can add a considerable amount of personalised energy to it.


Aquarius
Pisces
Gemini
Cancer
Leo
Virgo
Libra
Scorpius
Sagittarius
Capricornus

The 12 signs in the Western zodiac are based on ancient Greek interpretations of Babylonian constellations

Image source: Wiki

The full Moon is seen as the pinnacle point of the lunar calendar, when psychic abilities and intuition are at their strongest

Image source: Pixabay

Image source: Getty

FULL MOON, ESBATS & MAGIC

The Moon can play a vital role in spellcraft. Traditionally many cultures have believed in its power to affect and enhance spells

Written by Dee Dee Chainey

Much contemporary Paganism is grounded in the lunar cycle, and each phase has its own specific energy. The period when the Moon diminishes from the full Moon to the dark Moon is called the waning Moon, and often linked with banishing magic: a time of cleansing, reflection and the clearing out of the old. In contrast, the period when it grows from dark to full is called the waxing Moon, associated with growth, new possibilities and building intention.

The full Moon itself is one of the most magically potent times of the month. It is a time of illumination, when the Moon is at its full power and things will be brought into the light; the time when all waxing Moon magic will come to fruition and manifest. Many modern Pagans see the moon as a symbol of their Goddess.

Traditionally, full Moon 'esbats' are monthly gatherings where many Pagans meet in groups to celebrate their faith on or around the evening of the full Moon. Sometimes the groups will identify as a coven, particularly if they are a Wiccan group. While these meetings often take place outdoors within nature, city-based groups often also meet in houses, local spiritual centres, or even pub function rooms. In contrast, many solitary Pagans will conduct their own personal ceremonies outdoors or at home. Druid groves do not celebrate esbats or hold full Moon gatherings in the same way; some prefer to meet at the dark or new Moon, yet full Moon worship is still commonplace, just holding different symbolism. Full Moon celebrations are considered more personal and less ceremonial than the Sabbats, which honour the more formal festivals of the Wheel of the Year. Many Pagans find observing these additional 12 or 13 full Moon evenings a year a way of taking regular time out to mark their spirituality and celebrate their beliefs. A circle is often cast to create a sacred, protected space within which to conduct a full Moon ritual - often calling on spirits or elementals as witness - and banished once work is complete. Meaningful rituals are performed, and thanks is given to nature or the chosen deities. Some use this time for divination, for example a tarot or oracle reading for the month ahead. Meditations often take place around seasonal themes, or surrounding the specific names for each full Moon – which vary, depending on a person's beliefs and tradition. Full Moon esbats can include performing candle magic or other forms of spellwork, often with a focus on cleansing, healing, or spiritual balance and progression.

Some believe the waxing, full and waning Moon represent the different aspects of the triple, or three-fold, Goddess: the Maiden, Mother, Crone

Image source: Unsplash

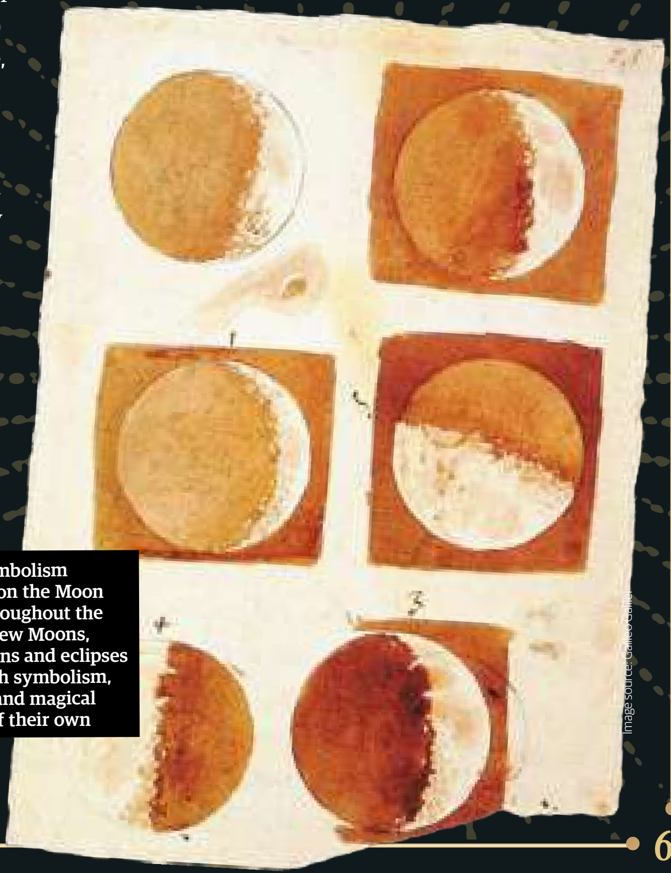

Lunar symbolism depends on the Moon phase throughout the month. New Moons, dark Moons and eclipses come with symbolism, worship and magical themes of their own

Image source: Galileo Galilei

MOON PHASES

The Moon affects the spells that you do. Here's how to harness its power

When the Moon is new, and waxing, its curved edge is on the right. It increases in size every night until it becomes the full Moon. Then it begins to shrink from the right – its curved side is now on the left, until it disappears from view to become the dark Moon, before beginning the cycle again. The Moon is known as 'waxing gibbous' when it's over half full with the curve on the right, and 'waning gibbous' when it's half 'empty' with the curve on the left. You can look up online what the phase of the Moon is at any given time, and also when moonrise and moonset for your local area will be each night (or day!), but it's worth taking the time to look up at the sky regularly and familiarise yourself with its rhythms, until eventually you'll know what phase the Moon is in without needing to check (You can also download apps to help you out!).

1

NEW MOON

Spells for:

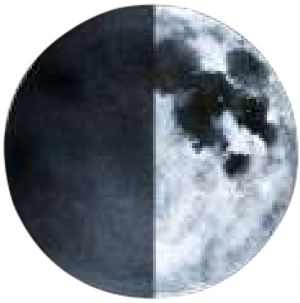
Healing (promoting wellness)
Seeking love
Planting and gardening
Creativity
New beginings

2

WAXING CRESCENT

Spells for:

Movement and progression
Blessings
Luck and fortune
Beauty
Happiness

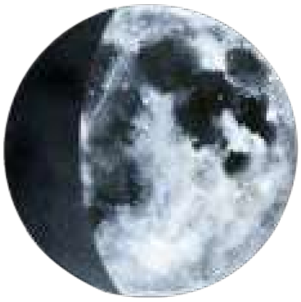


3

FIRST QUARTER

Spells for:

Courage and protection
Attraction
Luck and fortune
Finding lost things
Friendship



4

WAXING GIBBOUS

Spells for:

Harmony and peace
Healing
Motivation
Courage and protection
Raising energy

BLOOD MOON

A total lunar eclipse occurs when the Earth's shadow is between the full Moon and the Sun, cutting off direct sunlight to the Moon and turning it an eerie shade of red. They're associated with portents, predictions and fortune telling, and occur every few years.

Some modern Pagans believe that spells shouldn't be cast on a Blood Moon, but this is a relatively new idea not found in ancient texts

> “The full Moon itself is one of the most magically potent times of the month. It is a time of illumination”

BLUE MOON

A Blue Moon is the second full Moon in a calendar month, or, according to the *Maine Farmers' Almanac*, the third full moon in an astronomical season that includes four full moons. This rare occurrence lends regular full Moon spells even more lunar energy!

5

FULL MOON

Spells for:

Love
Healing
Blessings
Luck and fortune
Revelation and divination
Fertility

6

WANING GIBBOUS

Spells for:

Protection
Letting go
Reducing stress
Psychic cleansing
Banishing negativity

7

THIRD QUARTER

Spells for:

Healing (banishing illness)
Letting go
Ritual purification
Protection
Banishing negativity

8

WANING CRESCENT

Spells for:

Banishing negativity
Cleansing and purification
Protection
Reducing stress
Healing (banishing illness)

9

THE DARK MOON

Spells for:

Change
Resolving arguments
Peace
Revelation and divination
Justice
Healing

In some traditions, notably Native American ones, each lunation has a specfic name. Many others have now adopted those names

Image source: Getty

St Brigid – pagan goddess

St Brigid is one of the patron saints of Ireland yet she shares a curious connection to an earlier Brigid. In pre-Christian Ireland there was a goddess named Brigid who had powers over medicine, crafts, cattle, sacred wells, and fire. At some point St Brigid and Brigid became syncretised into the same figure. The attributes of the deity became the same as those of the saint. The holy wells and eternal fire of St Brigid would not have been out of place in the pagan worship of Brigid.

Perhaps unsurprisingly St Brigid was called on for aid in many of the same ways as the goddess had been. The 1st of February is both St Brigid's day and Brigid's pagan Imbolc and a good time to invoke either or both. A poem from 1735 describes how St Brigid was used in a ritual to protect the house by hanging a cross made from rushes.

"St Brigid's cross hung over door
Which did the house from fire secure
As Gillo thought, O powerful charm
To keep a house from taking harm;
And tho' the dogs and servants slept,
By Brigid's care the house was kept."

While saints and gods are familiar from orthodox faith they have also found a role in folk magic and spellcasting too

Image source: Getty

GODS, SAINTS AND SPELLCRAFT

When religion and magic combine the results can be startling – yet every religion seems to find its way into magical practise

Written by Ben Gazur

Religion and magic can often be confused by the outsider, as both operate beyond conventional rationality and science. Is it magic when the consecrated host used during Mass is transubstantiated into the literal body of Christ? Most Catholics today would say no, that there is no crossover between the magical and the miraculous. Yet throughout history there have been many who would consider themselves religiously orthodox that employed magic that called on powers – be they saints, Gods, or spirits.

Many medieval spells call on both ancient pagan deities and saints of the Christian church who share similar symbolism

Religion and magic

Spells, like prayers, are a method of converting speech and thought into change in the universe. Believers in either think that with the correct formulation and intent then the laws of the universe as we usually understand them will be suspended to fulfil their desire. In the ancient world of Greece and Rome, prayers were often accompanied by elaborate rituals. If even a single word was misspoken or a vital step forgotten then the prayer would go unfulfilled. At this formative period in European history, magic and religion were unified and inextricably linked. A Roman, or Greek, or Egyptian, would think nothing of invoking their gods in private affairs. When Honoratus of Bath lost two wheels and four cows he wrote his prayer addressed to the god Mercury on a lead tablet and ritually deposited it in water. Here a god was called on to punish the thief, "that you do not allow health to the person who has done me wrong, nor allow him to lie or sit or drink or eat" until the property is returned. Because there were no holy books as we would understand them to guide the religions of the ancient world, religions were a lot more fluid and folk wisdom was hugely influential.

Even with the coming of the Religions of the Book, magical use of religion persisted. Among the Greek Magical Papyri recovered from the sands of Egypt is a fragment known to scholars as 'Jacob's Prayer'. This prayer uses many of the tropes of magical spells while also using biblical themes. Written in Greek it implores God to "Fill me with wisdom, empower me, Lord." It also uses Hebrew words in a form of magical invocation before giving instructions to "say the prayer of Jacob seven times to the north and east." Such stage direction is more

"Spells, like prayers, convert thought into change in the universe"

Image source: Getty

common in spellcasting than in prayer. Most readers of the text would have a hard time classifying it as either prayer or spell, partaking as it does in features of both. The spread of Christianity into pagan Europe in the first millennium was not completed in a single day. In many places followers of Jesus and believers in pagan deities existed side by side. One famous Viking, Helgi, was known to pray to Jesus on land, but at sea he called on Thor. For the Christian any prayer to a pagan god would have been a magical, and possibly diabolic, spell, but we do have evidence of people calling on both pagan and Christian gods in charms.

The Anglo-Saxon metrical charms are a collection of spells written down in the 10th century in Old English. One of these, the ‘Nine Herbs Charm’, explains the uses various plants can be employed for. The potency of these plants is explained in the charm as coming from “Christ [who] stood over illness as none other”, and from the Germanic god Woden, who created the plants by killing a snake. Is the charm a Christian prayer or a pagan spell? All the Religions of the Book have traditions of magic associated with them, from Jewish golems to Islamic alchemy.

Islam in the modern world takes a very dim view of anyone with claims of supernatural power. But when Constantinople was besieged by the forces of Mehmet II he called on astrologers and fortune tellers to predict the outcome of his attack. Perhaps foreseeing what Mehmet would want to hear, they predicted a grand victory. Bolstered with this knowledge, the forces of Mehmet fought ferociously and did in fact capture the city.

The Islamic world was also one of the great centres of alchemical study. The esoteric study of nature that this involved often crossed over into realms of charm and spell. Ahmad al-Buni wrote an influential grimoire in the 13th century that, among other things, described how the 99 names of God could be employed to create talismans and word squares that gave their wielders magical abilities.

Image source: Wiki/ Creative Commons/ Mike Peel

Roman curse tablets were written on lead sheets and placed in springs to call the divine wrath of the gods down on enemies

Saints and spells

On the whole the Bible is not a comforting book for those who seek to use magic, containing as it does such discouraging verses as “You shall not permit a sorceress to live,” and “There shall not be found among you… anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord.” Yet it is interesting to see how the Bible has incorporated gods from other religions and how Christian saints have been called on to perform magic by followers. The Old Testament mentions many other gods, but often casts them as evil demons. Dagon, god of the Philistines, is said to have been toppled in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant, but later magical traditions were said to still call on

The Anglo-Saxon land-healing charm ‘Æcerbot’ calls on both Christianity and the Earth Mother

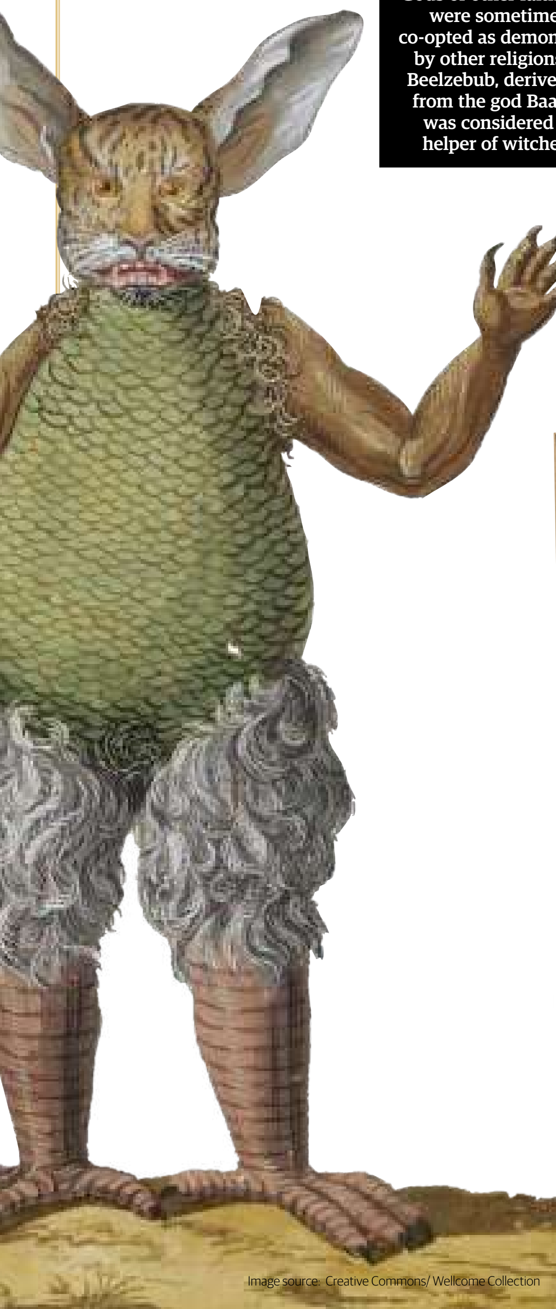

Gods of other faiths were sometimes co-opted as demons by other religions. Beelzebub, derived from the god Baal, was considered a helper of witches

Image source: Creative Commons/ Wellcome Collection

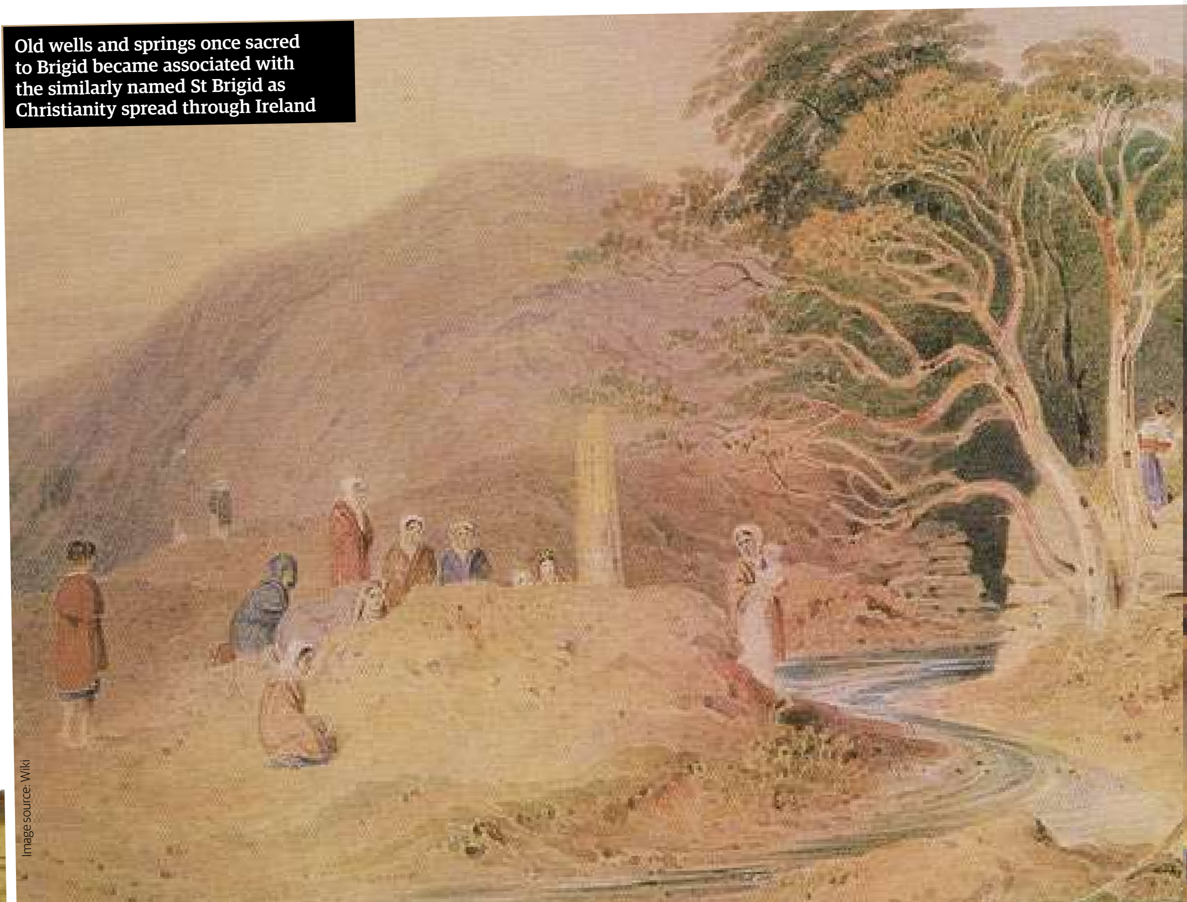

Old wells and springs once sacred to Brigid became associated with the similarly named St Brigid as Christianity spread through Ireland

Image source: Wiki

Islamic magicians like Al-Buni constructed tables linking the movements of the heavens to letters found in the divine names of Allah

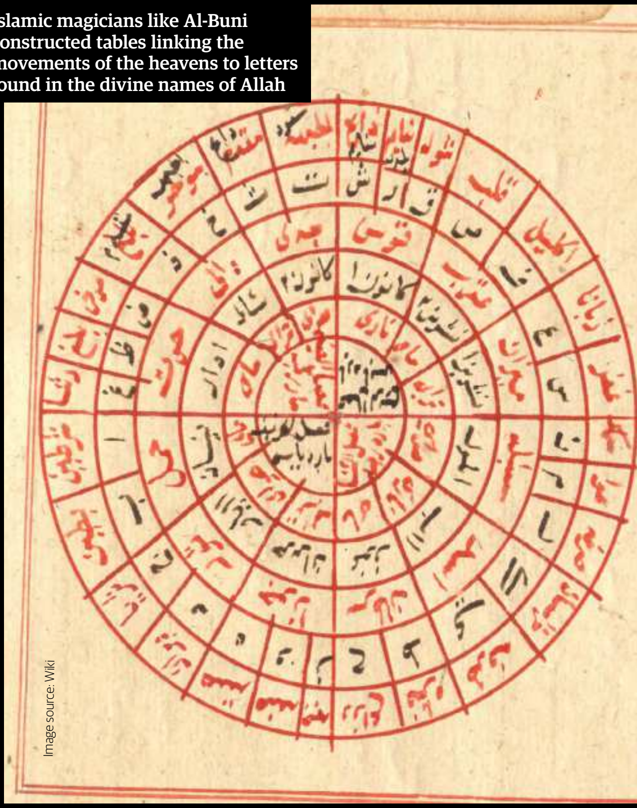


Image source: Wiki

his power. Perhaps the most notable opponent of the biblical God was Baal, an ancient deity that the Israelites turned to at various times. It may be because of his tempting ways that he metamorphosed into Beelzebub, who was either a terrible demon or Satan himself to later Christianity. That many witches throughout history are said to have drawn their power from him suggests that the old rivalry between the gods never really ended.

Of course, not all ancient gods were assimilated into other religions as devils. The pagan pantheons were infinitely flexible and welcomed new gods all the time for their adherents to use in magic and prayers. Even Christianity was not immune to this. The new faith was made more palatable to pagans by building churches on former holy sites, celebrating similar festivals, and associating old gods with new saints. The similarities between the pagan goddess Brigid and the Christian St Brigid are striking. Even the stories of Jesus' life and deeds owe something to the tales of gods and other holy men current at the time, like Mithras and Apollonius of Tyana. It was only natural then that Christian saints were often called on in ways that would have been familiar to pagan practioners.

Saints are useful intermediaries for Christians who wish to attract divine goodwill. Someone who has lost a set of keys might appeal to Saint Zita rather than bother the almighty. A prayer to her would have the same effect as a location spell. Chanting a prayer to Christian saints can seem very like an incantation. "Mary, Bride, Michael, Paul, Peter, Gabriel, John of love… Never shall the canker worm get near us."

Some saints have come to serve a dual role – they are both magical individuals and saints. St Columba of Sens is sometimes depicted with a broom and witch's hat. In Galicia in Spain she is both the protector of witches and a protector of the bewitched.

Systems and syncretism

When thinking of gods, saints, and spirits in magical systems it is helpful to think of them not as beings but as symbols. When a patron saint is invoked in a spell it is not the saint as a person, however holy, that is being called on but their power over a certain aspect of the universe. This is the idea that facilitates syncretism. Instead of co-opting part of a religion it is simply a power that is being called on, a concept whose meaning we express by using iconography, imagery and words that symbolise it. There are pagans who will search for a parking space by saying "Mother Cabrini, Mother Cabrini, please find a space for my parking machiney." Apparently this little spell works whether you believe in her or not!

Syncretism in magic and religion is still very much in action. The adoption by some Mexican Catholics of Santa Muerte as personification of death and protectress has been frowned on by officials of the Catholic Church. Haitian Vodou brings together folk religions derived from West Africa, Catholicism, European mysticism, and native Taino religious beliefs. Each of the Loa spirits of Vodou is linked to a Catholic saint. Papa Legba is associated with Saint Anthony, for instance. The intricacies of syncretism in spellcasting can be complex. As Papa Legba is the guardian of crossroads and human interaction with spirits, you could do worse than to pour out some water in supplication to him. He might just guide you to the truth. A prayer to St Anthony might not hurt either.

BUILDING A SPELL

Practitioners of spellcraft believe that some things have magical links that can be used to enhance your spells. Find out how to use them

Written by April Madden

In the article on p46, we saw how some practitioners believe that certain plants, objects, colours and stones have conceptual links called correspondences. Throughout history, people have used these correspondences in the belief that they can help to enhance the power of a spell. 'Tables of correspondences' were compiled and used by the ancient alchemists and later by famous esoteric practitioners such as Paracelsus and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa; they're also a feature of traditional Chinese and Indian medicine systems. Correspondences help you to design your own spells, by explaining key ingredients and their benefits.

Among the oldest and most widely used of these sets of correspondences are those associated with the seven traditional planets of ancient Western astrology. These include the Sun and the Moon (because they're the product of a geocentric worldview), but not the outer planets Uranus (discovered in 1781) or Neptune (discovered in 1846). You can look up correspondences for the two outer planets online, but these are later additions compiled by more recent practitioners, whereas correspondences for the seven traditional planets have been in use for close to 2000 years. Each planet embodies certain values, which are listed in the Influences column. To design your own spell or enhance and personalise one of the ones in this book, check the Influences column to find the most appropriate, then assemble the corresponding ingredients that you need. Factor in the phases of the Moon (and perhaps what zodiac sign it's in) along with the current and upcoming zodiac season to find the optimum time for casting your spell.

Most of the plants listed here are edible: the only ones that aren't are frankincense, moonwort, cypress and some kinds of jasmine (Jasminum sambac is fine, but other varieties can be poisonous, so eating jasmine is best avoided). They are all touch-safe too, unless you or someone you're casting with or for has an allergy (eg to sesame) - make sure you're aware of this. Please note Mercury and Saturn's traditional metals are highly poisonous to both touch and ingest - they are listed here solely for the sake of completion - so stick to using the gemstones listed for these two planets instead.

You can find many more detailed tables of correspondences online: Witchipedia is an excellent resource

"Correspondences help you to design your own spells"

Planet	Plants & herbs	Colours	Metal & stones	Symbol	Influences
Sun	Sunflower, marigold, frankincense, chamomile	Gold, red, orange, yellow	Gold, amber, ruby, topaz	☉	Success, fortune, strength, confidence
Moon	Moonwort, jasmine, watercress, hibiscus	Silver, white, grey	Silver, moonstone, pearl	☽	Love, fortune, protection, peace
Mercury	Carrot, hyssop, juniper, chervil	Yellow, orange, leaf green	Mercury, opal, agate	☿	Fortune, divination, guidance
Venus	Apple, rose, sesame, olive	Green, turquoise	Copper, emerald, rose quartz	♀	Love, fortune, beauty, fertility
Mars	Nettles, mustard, ginger	Red, dark orange	Iron, ruby, garnet	♂	Judgement, strength, power
Jupiter	Barley, clary sage, honeysuckle, clove	Blue, violet	Tin, sapphire, amethyst	♃	Fortune, peace, co-operation, cleansing
Saturn	Asparagus, comfrey, cypress, all grains	Black, brown	Lead, onyx, smoky quartz	♄	Fortune, intellect, power, success

Image source: Alamy, Getty

THE WHEEL OF THE YEAR

The timing of your spells can be crucial. Understanding the eight festivals of the Wheel of the Year can provide a useful guide

Written by Willow Winsham

The idea of the year as a wheel, cycling through the four seasons in a never-ending journey from darkness to light, features with varying degrees of prominence in the beliefs of many modern Pagans. Although there are variations between groups and locations, the Wheel of the Year generally marks eight (or in some cases four) seasonal festivals that celebrate the cyclic nature of the world around us.

Linked to the annual journey of the Sun and the birth, death, and rebirth of the gods, the wheel is based on the natural solar divisions of the solstices and equinoxes, with four of the festivals – Ostara, Litha, Mabon and Yule – marking these quarter days of the year. The two solstices mark the point when the Sun reaches its highest point in the sky at each pole, and thus the longest and shortest days of the year, the start of summer and winter. By contrast, as the name implies, the two equinoxes are the points when the sun is directly above the equator, with day and night being of almost equal length and heralding the start of spring and autumn. Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh and Samhain, the remaining four festivals, mark a seasonal midpoint between each, and are known as cross quarter days. Although attempts have been made to prove a direct continuity from the past to the present, historically, evidence suggests that in practice, the wheel of eight festivals was not celebrated in its current form until recent times. There were many variations in what was celebrated and when, and the cycle that is now observed was not in place for our ancestors. For instance, Celtic practice may have focused on the cross-quarter days, while Anglo Saxons observed the quarter days for their celebrations. Under the influence of Robert Graves, Gerald Gardner and others, by the mid-20th century, the Wheel of the Year and the festivals within it, were familiar terminology within Pagan communities. The ways in which the festivals are celebrated today however does have roots in folklore practices and traditions. The focus now as then was on community sabbats or celebrations, coming together to give thanks, with offerings made to nature, the deities or spirits revered on a collective or individual level. Solitary Pagans may also choose to celebrate the Sabbats alone, in their own way. They are excellent occasions for spellcasting, if the right one is chosen.

> The 'tides' of the year can be incredibly useful when choosing the best time to cast an effective spell

Rituals and incantations, along with feasting and celebration, make up the modern observance of the seasonal festivals of the year

> "By the mid-20th century, the Wheel of the Year and the festivals within it, were familiar terminology"

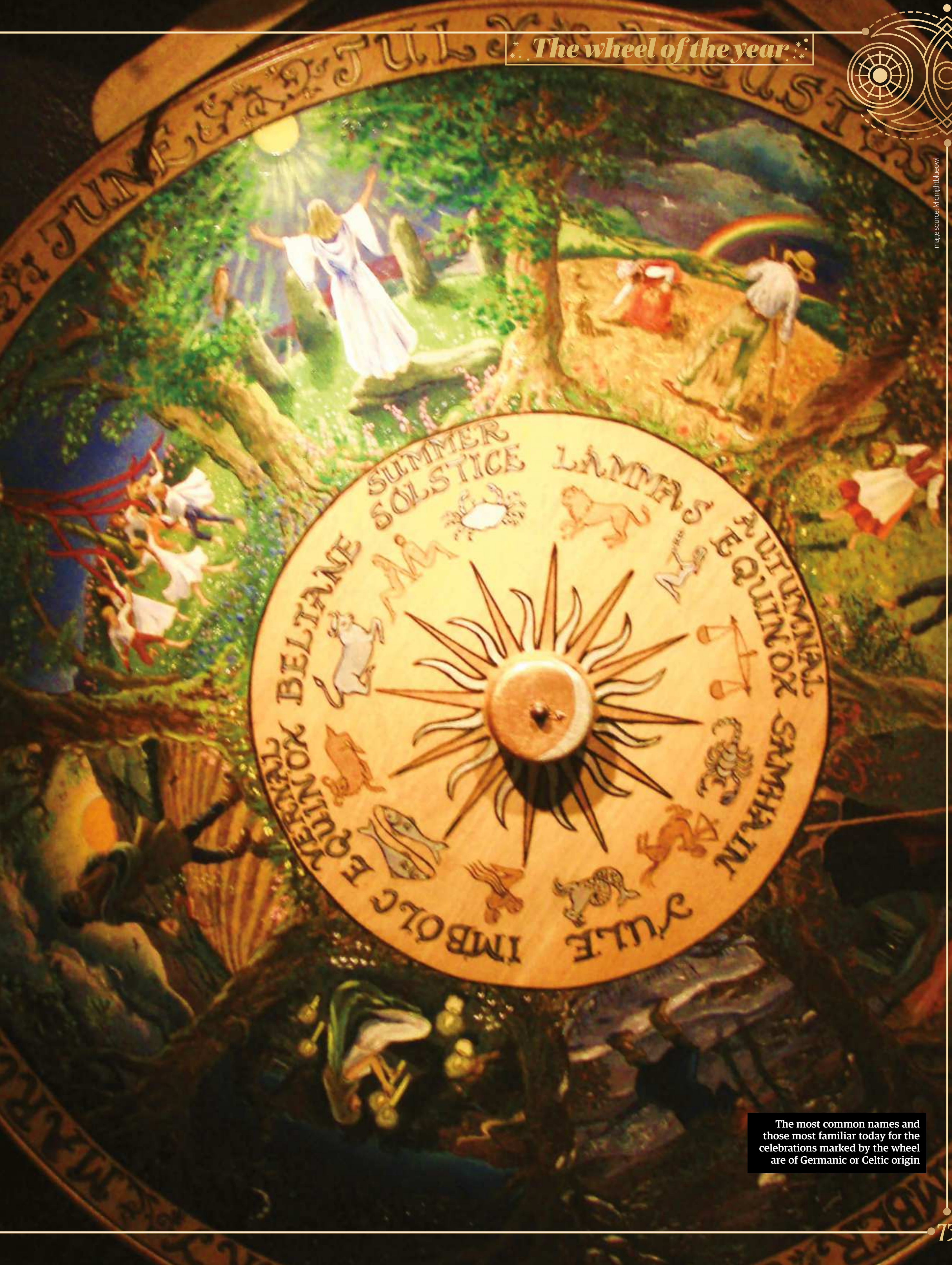

JUNE
JULY
AUGUST
SUMMER SOLSTICE
LAMMAS
AUTUMNAL EQUINOX
SAMHAIN
YULE
IMBOLC
VERNAL EQUINOX
BELTANE

Image source: Midnightblueowl

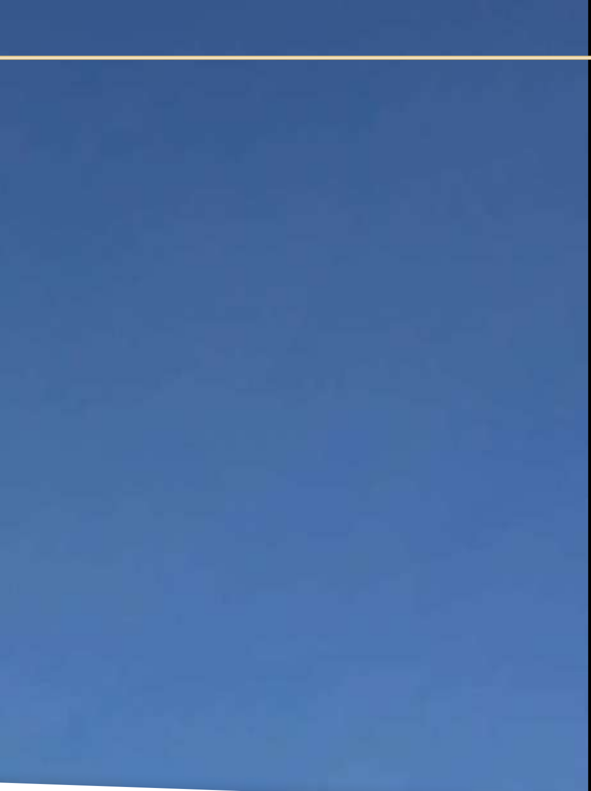
The most common names and those most familiar today for the celebrations marked by the wheel are of Germanic or Celtic origin

This Holly King figure stands in South Barrule in the UK's Isle of Man. He represents the energy of the dark half of the year, between midsummer and the winter festival Yule

Image source: Alamy

Suitable spells

Yule is a festival of returning light and new beginnings, so it's ideal for spells that bless or celebrate the start of a new project or endeavour, or for symbolic gestures of renewal and improvement (the familiar concept of New Year's Resolutions takes advantage of this energy). As a warm, nurturing midwinter festival it's also good for casting spells of protection on loved ones, particularly children, and on the home. Because it celebrates the Sun returning and the days getting longer, it's also a good time for spells of fortune or increase – the traditional coin in the Christmas pudding is an old folk magic token that brings luck and wealth to whichever diner finds it. Candle magic is particularly potent at Yule, as are other kinds of spells that involve light, such as working with mirrors.



Mistletoe is associated with Yule. In Roman tradition it symbolises protection while travelling through the underworld, as in the *Aeneid*

Image source: Thinkstock

With its distinctive red berries and sharp leaves, at Yule holly represents the shift from the dark half of the year into the light

Image source: Thinkstock

YULE

The longest, darkest night of the year is the time when solar deities are reborn, as the Sun returns and the days begin to lengthen

Written by Willow Winsham

The midwinter festival celebrated on 21 December is most commonly known today as Yule. Of pre-Christian origin, with connections that span back to the Neolithic period and perhaps beyond, Yule takes place at the midwinter solstice, or the longest night, when, in the northern hemisphere, the north pole is tilted furthest away from the Sun.

A time of hope and rebirth, Yule brings with it the promise of gradually lengthening days and the return of the Sun. The focus of the celebrations is the idea of light coming forth out of darkness, along with the death of the Sun and subsequent rebirth. The Holly King who rules over the dark half of the year is believed by many to give way to the Oak King, who brings with him the returning light.

Many midwinter festivals have similar themes, such as the birth or return of a god, symbolically linked to the Sun

Yule has connections with other midwinter festivals such as Saturnalia, the ancient Roman festival celebrated between 17 and 23 December. This precursor of many future midwinter celebrations was held in the name of Saturn, and was a time of great feasting and merriment. Saturnalia is best known as a festival of social subversion, when slaves could speak their mind without repercussions, and were feasted by their masters. It also shares obvious similarities with Christmas, with much of the same imagery and traditions adopted by the later Christian festival.

One of the most popular traditions associated with Yule is the Yule log. Amidst much revelry, the selected branch or log was taken into the house and set in the hearth, decorated, then doused with spirits. Using a section from the previous Yule log, kept for that purpose, the new log was lit, with the idea that celebrations continue as long as it burns. Nothing was wasted, with the ashes used to protect fields and enhance the fertility of the soil.

The use of greenery is also prominent in Yule celebrations, with evergreens used for decoration and symbolism throughout.

"The focus of the celebrations is light coming forth out of darkness"

IMBOLC

The stirrings of spring, marking the end of the dark half of the year, Imbolc was celebrated with candles, rushes, and the presence of the goddess Brigid

Written by Willow Winsham

The festival of Imbolc was, historically, another of the four seasonal celebrations observed by Gaelic communities during the year. Taking place on 1 February, this festival marked the start of spring, with all the hope, wonder and enthusiasm that time heralded.

Unlike some celebrations of more recent origin, Imbolc appears to have held an important place in the Irish calendar from at least the 10th century. Like many such traditions, the exact origin of the name is uncertain. Suggestions include derivation from the old Irish word or cleansing, or, another suggestion, the meaning "in the belly" as a nod to the ewes that were expectant at that time of year.

Imbolc is sometimes referred to as Candlemas, after the Christian festival of motherhood and light held around the same time

Brigid, originally as a pagan goddess and then as a Christian saint, is an important Imbolc figure. Although practices varied, the idea that Brigid ushered in the lighter days of spring , leading people from the dark half of the year, was central to her part in Imbolc traditions. Deeply venerated, she was invited into households as an honoured guest, where she was variously feasted, entertained and invited to sleep in a specially prepared bed. Households would leave small objects in the hope Brigid would bless them when she visited on Imbolc eve. Rushes or reeds also played a big part; in Northern Ireland they were carried as a symbolic Brigid circled the household, some were laid out on the floor, fashioned into crosses, or used to make the saint a bed to sleep in.

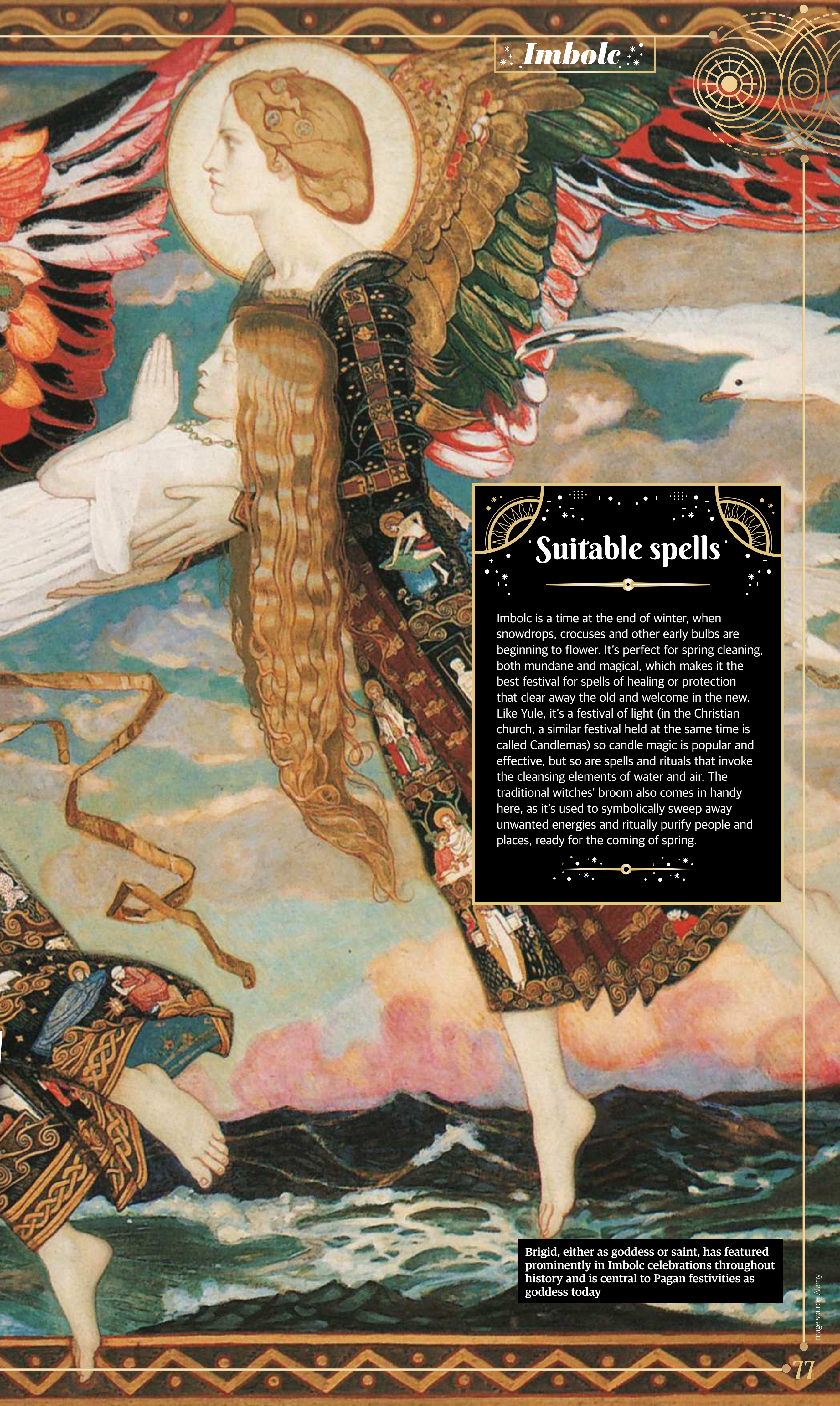
Brideogs, representations of Brigid made from reeds and dressed in cloth and flowers, were familiar sights in both Ireland and Scotland. Processions took them from house to house, where gifts and further decoration were bestowed upon them, before the figure was feasted and laid to rest for the night.

The purifying nature of fire was significant, with candles marking a reminder of the promise of the Sun returning as the year unfolded. Today, Brigid is at the heart of Pagan Imbolc celebrations. Imbolc also has links to the Gaelic winter hag, the Cailleach. As tradition goes, it is at Imbolc that she collects wood for her fire to see her through to the end of the winter. A sunny Imbolc enabled her to collect more, and thus foretold a long winter. If the weather at Imbolc is bad, then winter will soon be over, as the Cailleach would not have enough firewood to last. Today, Imbolc is celebrated in a variety of forms.

> "The purifying nature of fire was significant"

Flowers such as the snowdrop are among the first to signal the changing of the seasons, as Imbolc ushers in the spring

In a recent Imbolc celebration, the Green Man and Jack Frost do battle for control of the seasons: spring emerges triumphant



Suitable spells

Imbolc is a time at the end of winter, when snowdrops, crocuses and other early bulbs are beginning to flower. It's perfect for spring cleaning, both mundane and magical, which makes it the best festival for spells of healing or protection that clear away the old and welcome in the new. Like Yule, it's a festival of light (in the Christian church, a similar festival held at the same time is called Candlemas) so candle magic is popular and effective, but so are spells and rituals that invoke the cleansing elements of water and air. The traditional witches' broom also comes in handy here, as it's used to symbolically sweep away unwanted energies and ritually purify people and places, ready for the coming of spring.

Brigid, either as goddess or saint, has featured prominently in Imbolc celebrations throughout history and is central to Pagan festivities as goddess today

Image source: Alamy

Image source: Redsimon

Image source: Getty

Suitable spells

Ostara is a spring festival, in some ways equivalent to the Christian Easter, which is all about growth, nature and renewal, so it's an ideal time for luck and blessing spells – especially those centred on increasing wealth, beginning an important project or trying to conceive! As an equinox, when day and night are of the same length, it's also a good time for spells that focus on balance, such as healing spells that promote mental or physical stability. Earth spells that involve plants and flowers (such as symbolically planting seeds) are particularly potent at this time of year – just remember to nurture the seedlings you plant!

The popular tale of Eostre and the snow hare may have its origins in the Ukranian story of how pysanky - coloured eggs - came to be

OSTARA

Modern celebration, worship of an ancient goddess, or the origin of Easter; what do eggs, hares and church fathers have to do with the spring equinox?

Written by Willow Winsham

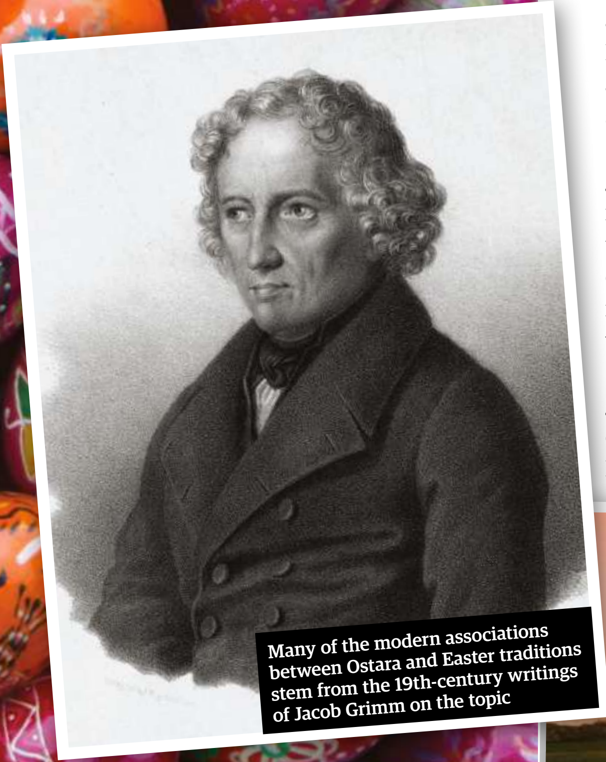
Ostara is a festival of spring time. Usually celebrated by many at the time of the spring equinox, falling between 19 and 22 March each year, the overarching theme of this celebration, observed by many Pagans today, is that of new beginnings, new life, fertility and renewal. One of the times of year when the nights and days are of equal length, Ostara heralds the shift towards longer, lighter days, the beginning of new cycles of life amidst nature, and the celebration of the Spring Maiden, with her promise of fertility and renewal. Flowers, eggs and rabbits are all strongly associated with modern Ostara.

Ostara, or Eostre is believed by many to be the goddess of this festival, and holds significance for many modern Pagans in their celebrations at this time of year. Ideas about the goddess include origins as an ancient goddess of the dawn, or a fertility goddess, though her biggest association is with the bringing of spring.

But what were the origins of this popular goddess? The only historical reference to Eostre comes from the writings of church father, Bede. He refers to the old name for April, Eosturmonata, and his assumption it marked the celebration of a Germanic goddess of that name. The writings of 19th century folklorist Jacob Grimm helped further perpetuate and popularise the idea. His was the first mention of the Germanic Ostara, and it is from his work that most 'ancient facts' regarding the goddess actually stem from. Other fallacies frequently repeated regarding Ostara and Eostre include an assumed etymological link to the word oestrogen, and links with the Assyrian goddess Ishtar. Hares, eggs and bunnies were also absent from the historical festival until amalgamated into it by Jacob Grimm, but have, thanks to the promulgation of his work, become associated with modern celebrations of Ostara.

> Eostre is thought to be linked to Proto-Indo-European dawn goddess Hausōs and to other spring and Sun deities

Although debate exists today over whether Bede outright invented Eostre for purposes that remain unclear, this does little to diminish her popularity. A tale with origins in the 19th century tells of how the goddess was late to bring the spring one year. As a result, a small bird died, much to the grief of a little girl who found it. What did the goddess do? She turned the poor creature into a snow hare, the magical creature delighting the child by laying rainbow coloured eggs. Each year, the goddess told the girl, watch for the arrival of the snow hare. For then everyone would know that spring had arrived.



Many of the modern associations between Ostara and Easter traditions stem from the 19th-century writings of Jacob Grimm on the topic

Hundreds gather at Stonehenge each year to watch the sunrise that marks the dawn of the spring equinox

Image source: Thinkstock

BELTANE

Amidst fire and feasting, flowers and rituals of protection, Beltane celebrations mark the long-awaited start of summer and the warm months to follow

Written by Willow Winsham

Beltane is the cross quarter day of the year celebrated on 1 May, also popularly known as May Day.

This seasonal festival marks the beginning of summer, and is one of the most important and widely celebrated festivals of the Wheel of the Year.

Both historically and today, fire and Beltane go hand in hand. Bonfires have been a central part of Beltane celebrations for centuries past, both in celebration and ritual. One such ritual, recorded in Irish sources from the 10th century, involves leading cattle through or round lit bonfires amidst incantations, in the belief that this would bring protection for the months to come. It has also been considered lucky to walk around or jump over the bonfire. Bonfires feature prominently in celebrations of Beltane today, and it is still considered lucky to jump over the Beltane bonfire. Another important aspect of Beltane celebration is feasting, with offerings made to the spirits or gods for a fertile and prosperous summer ahead.

May Eve is sometimes known by its old name of Walpurgis Night, after English abbess St Walpurga

Although Belanus, 'The Shining One', a Sun god of Celtic origin, is often said to be associated with Beltane, as is Bel, the protector and father god, there is little historical evidence for these deities being a part of earlier celebrations. 'Bel' might, in fact, refer to a small gap or passage, while 'tane' or 'taine' is Old Irish for 'fire'.

For Beltane, windows and doors were decorated with May flowers. These were not mere ornament however, for those points of entry were believed to need most protection in a household, and the aos si or faeries had to be appeased. The hanging of boughs over doorways was also believed to bring good milk production for cows. It is also at Beltane that we see such familiar traditions as maypole dancing, the decorating of may bushes, and crowning the May Queen.

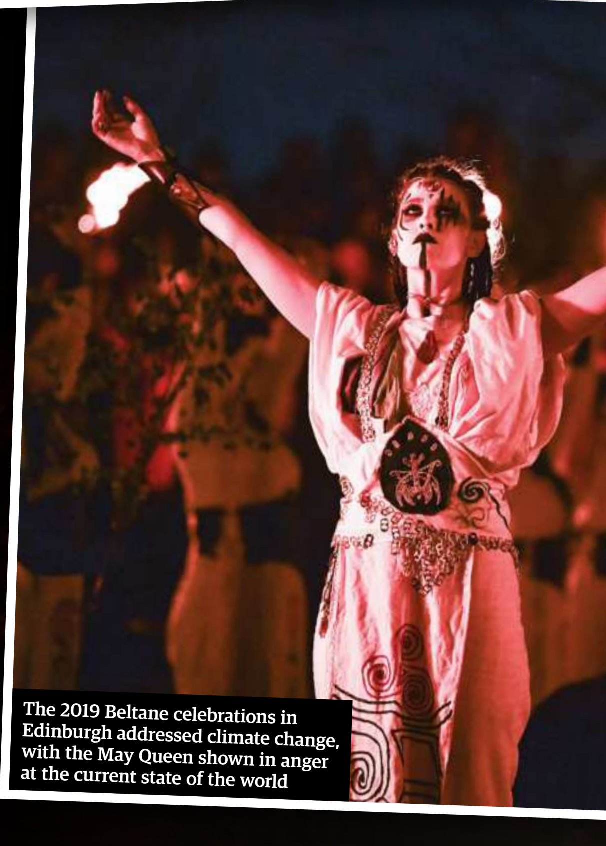
The veil between the worlds is said to be thin at Beltane. Due to this, there are many superstitions and traditions linked with May Day and May Eve. The first dew of Beltane is said to have magical qualities, guaranteeing those who bathe in it a perfect complexion.

The popularity of Beltane slowly declined, however, and by the mid 20th century was no longer widely celebrated. There has since been a cultural revival in some areas, with old and new practices coming together into modern celebrations of Beltane as observed by Pagans today.

> "Bonfires feature prominently in celebrations of Beltane today"

For those who rise early there is magic to be found in May Day dew; washing in it will ensure a fresh, clear complexion

Image source: Rvasudev



The 2019 Beltane celebrations in Edinburgh addressed climate change, with the May Queen shown in anger at the current state of the world

Fire, known for its protective and cleansing properties, is central to celebrations of Beltane, both past and present

Image source: Alamy

Image source: Getty

Suitable spells

Beltane, or May Eve, is one of the most sensual festivals of the old year, which makes it the ideal time for spells involving love, beauty and attraction. As a fire festival, candle magic can be used, but the ultimate vehicle for Beltane spells is the balefire, so if you have the room to safely have a garden bonfire or light a hearthfire, this will maximise the energy you can raise. Ribbon magic is also appropriate here, with its connection to the traditional Maypole: use coloured ribbons to weave a spell. And if you can be outside (especially in the woods) on Beltane rather than indoors, this will add the lively energy of spring to your spellcraft.

LITHA

The midsummer festival Litha celebrates the power of the Sun and the conquest of night, yet hints at the darkness to come

Written by Ben Gazur

The summer solstice has always been a traditional focal point of the year. On 21 or 22 June, in the Northern Hemisphere, the Sun reaches the end of its seasonal wanderings. No day is longer and no night is shorter. For today's Pagans this day is marked by the festival of Litha and represents the triumph of light over darkness.

Throughout northern Europe the day has been traditionally marked by huge bonfires whose blazes further diminish the night. Those who leapt through the flames, without mishap, were considered to have been blessed for the coming year. In the past midsummer was celebrated by setting fire to a wooden wheel representing the Sun and rolling it down a hill into a lake. This may reflect the dual nature of the summer solstice, in that while it is the longest day it also presages the return of winter, as from then on the days will become ever shorter. Christians incorporated midsummer festivities into their calendar by joining them to the feast of Saint John, who they believe was born six months before Jesus.

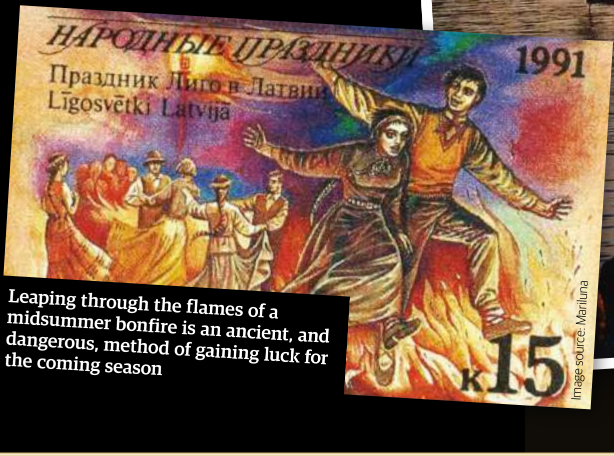
From the ancient veneration of midsummer in the old religions, the celebration of Litha has developed in modern Paganism. Traditionally the Oak King is thought to be at his strongest, with his brother the Holly King at his lowest ebb. To celebrate the victory of the Oak King, oak trees can be decorated with colourful scraps of cloth. With all the riches of the summer available Litha is a time of feasting on nature's delights like honey. It is also a time of purification when the dangers of the coming months can be washed away in wild bodies of water.

There are many ways to observe Litha, and as many consider it to be a day full of magic, there are many spells and rituals that can be performed then. In the day the light of the Sun may be used to gather herbs at their most potent. At night the fires that are set are thought to ward away evil as well as darkness. Folklore gives us many rites to try around these fires. Wishes can be 'given to a pebble' - whisper a wish to a stone in your hand as you walk three times around the fire and then toss it in if you want your wish to come true. Even the cold ashes of a Litha bonfire have power if they are used to create a magical talisman.

> Midsummer celebrates both the longest day of the Sun and the awareness that the days will now begin to shorten

Midsummer celebrations often incorporate fire to help drive back the night even further and extend the victory of the Sun

Image source: Petri Tapola



Leaping through the flames of a midsummer bonfire is an ancient, and dangerous, method of gaining luck for the coming season

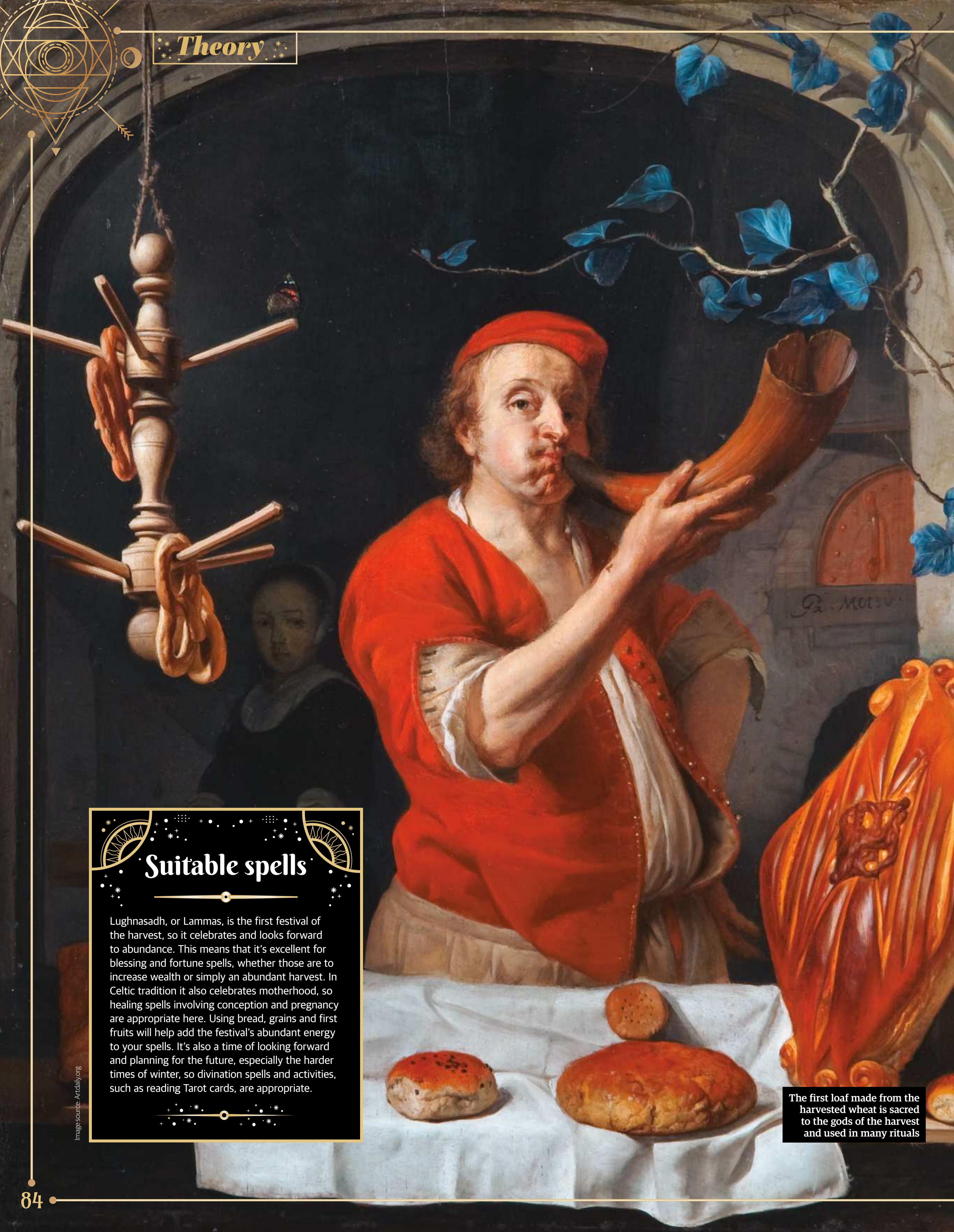
Image source: Mariluna

Suitable spells

Litha is another festival that lends itself beautifully to love spells, although unlike the fiery, passionate Beltane, Midsummer's Eve is a time for romance, so it's good for spells that focus on new relationships or on renewing existing ones. It's also an excellent time for cleansing and purification spells, including those that banish bad energies or unwanted baggage, and for invoking blessings. Sunlight, fire, fresh water and growing flowers are all useful for adding energy to spells at this time of year.

The summer solstice, also called Litha, is a time of pilgrimage for modern Pagans to ancient sites like Stonehenge

Image source: Getty



The first loaf made from the harvested wheat is sacred to the gods of the harvest and used in many rituals

Image source: Artdaily.org

Suitable spells

Lughnasadh, or Lammas, is the first festival of the harvest, so it celebrates and looks forward to abundance. This means that it's excellent for blessing and fortune spells, whether those are to increase wealth or simply an abundant harvest. In Celtic tradition it also celebrates motherhood, so healing spells involving conception and pregnancy are appropriate here. Using bread, grains and first fruits will help add the festival's abundant energy to your spells. It's also a time of looking forward and planning for the future, especially the harder times of winter, so divination spells and activities, such as reading Tarot cards, are appropriate.

LUGHNASADH

The first of three harvest festivals, Lughnasadh or Lammas focuses on the first wheat of the year, and the bread made from it

Written by Ben Gazur

Lughnasadh, also known as Lammas, marks the mid-point between summer and autumn and is the first of three harvest festival in the Pagan year. Falling around the beginning of August (or February in the southern hemisphere) it coincides with the first fruits of the harvest being brought in. In agrarian societies the time before the first harvest would have been one of dwindling supplies as they waited for the grain to ripen. After the backbreaking work of harvest, a celebration of the bounty was only natural.

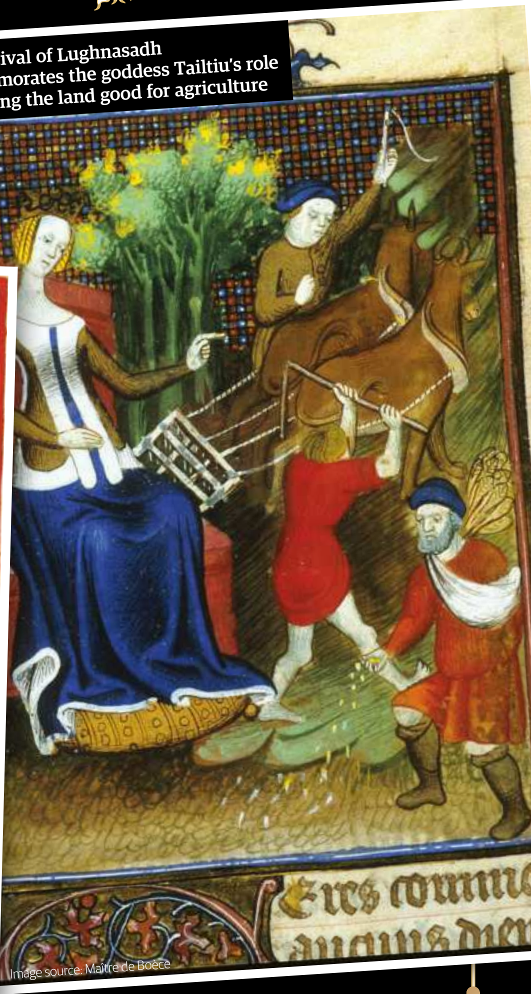
Lughnasadh takes its name from the Irish god Lugh, who is said to have instituted the festival in honour of his foster-mother Tailtiu. Tailtiu spent her life, literally, clearing Ireland to make it suitable for agriculture. At the end of her labours she dropped dead, so Lugh decided to celebrate her efforts when the first harvest came each year. Lughnasadh shows how the cycle of life, death, harvesting, and sowing are all bound together, with one year's crop being the next year's seed.

Lammas, meaning Loaf Mass, was the time in England when the first wheat was cut and turned into bread. The first loaf of the year was a sacred item and consecrated. An Anglo-Saxon ritual saw this bread torn into quarters and placed in the corners of a barn to protect the rest of the harvest. Christian tradition also saw the importance of the day, and loaves would be blessed by priests and marked with symbols.

Today Lammas and Lughnasadh are celebrated by Wiccans and other Pagans in many ways. As with other Sabbats in the Wheel of the Year, bonfires are popular. Here they mirror the Sun that has made the plants grow and give thanks, hopefully, for the good weather that accompanies the harvest. The baking of a special loaf is often performed and it may be shaped into the figure of a god, or of sheaves of wheat. Ritually eating the god brings the power of the harvest within the worshipper. The last stalks of wheat harvested are made into corn dollies.

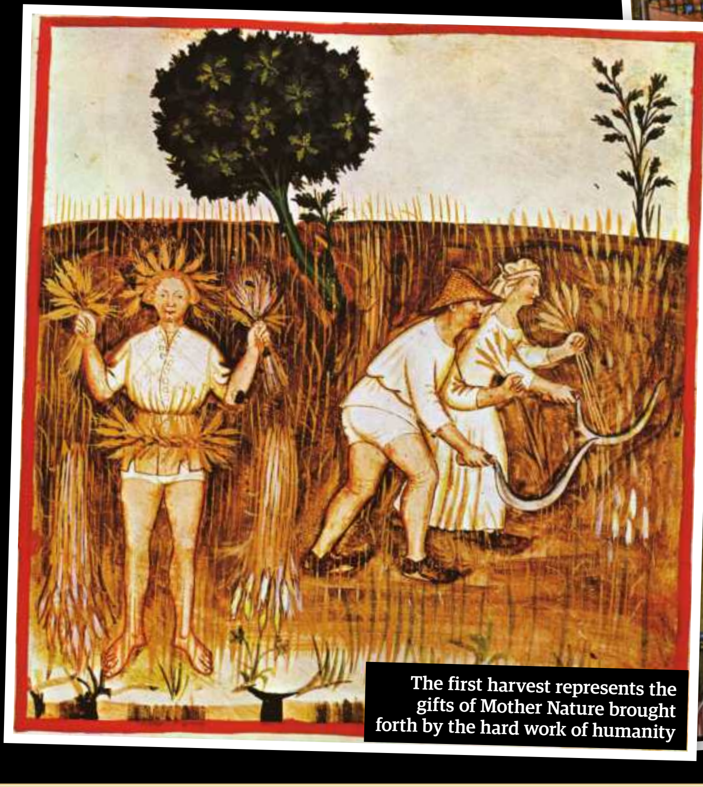
Other rites may prove more powerful at Lammas. Gerald Gardner and other witches used this day to perform a ritual in 1940 that was supposed raise a 'cone of power' over Britain and stop the Nazis invading. Not all gatherings have such lofty aims and many Pagans meet at Lammas to dance, sing, and feast to welcome back another successful and fertile year.

> "Gerald Gardner used this day in 1940 to perform a ritual to stop the Nazis invading Britain"



The festival of Lughnasadh commemorates the goddess Tailtiu's role in making the land good for agriculture

Image source: Maître de Boëce



The first harvest represents the gifts of Mother Nature brought forth by the hard work of humanity

MABON

At the autumnal equinox the nights become longer than the days, and people must prepare for the dark times ahead

Written by Ben Gazur

The autumnal equinox, when day and night are of equal length, is a turning point. Mabon is the day that begins the descent into winter as night overtakes day. Yet it is also celebrated as the second harvest festival in the Pagan calendar as nature continues to offer up its treasures. With the main harvest coming to an end, the equinox was a time of change. Farm labourers would be released from their contracts and new work sought. The whole year ahead might depend on your luck at this particular time.

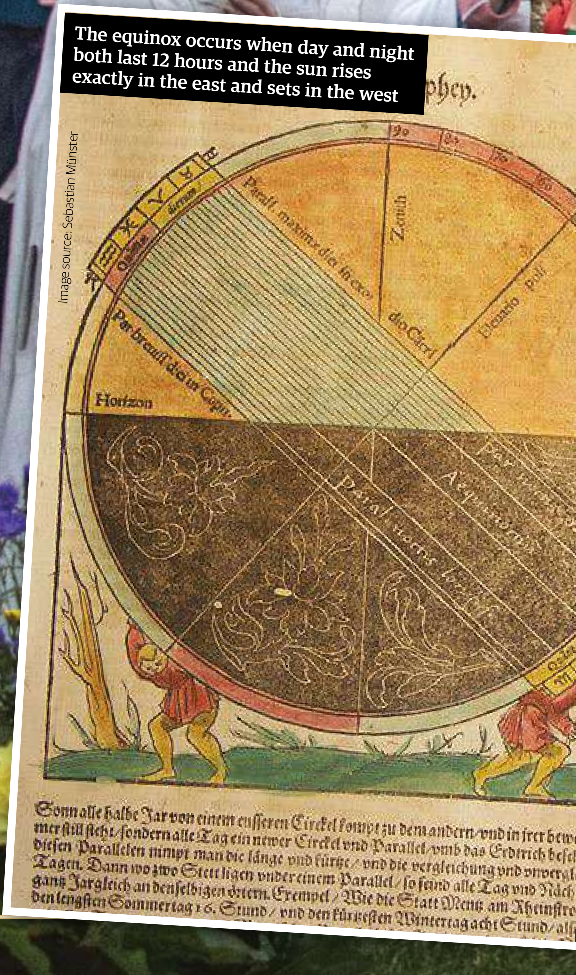
The name 'Mabon' comes from the legend of an Arthurian knight, who was the son of a Welsh Earth Mother goddess

The equinox was a key time of year for our ancestors, who had to work by daylight alone. As the sun lessened there were fewer hours in the day to store away food for the hard winter ahead. Many cultures marked the autumnal equinox, with many ancient sites being built so as to align with the rising Sun on those days. Pagans today will often gather at such sites to worship. While nothing can be done to stop the seasonal disappearance of the Sun, Pagans offer up praise for its abundance and calls for it to return in spring. The rite acknowledges the seasonal nature of sunlight, growth and the Earth.

The ancient pagans of Greece and Rome associated the autumnal equinox with the tale of Demeter and Persephone (Ceres and Proserpina to the Romans). Demeter was the fertility goddess responsible for the natural world and Persephone was her daughter. When the god of the dead stole Persephone away, Demeter in her grief stopped all living things from growing and winter set in. To save the Earth it was decreed that Persephone should spend half the year in Hades and half with her mother. While Persephone is in the realm of the living Demeter is happy and summer prevails, but the autumnal equinox marked her passage to the underworld.

To some Pagans the equinox is called Mabon and is a time to think on the delicate balance of life. Others see the ripening of grapes as a reason to celebrate the loosening powers of wine. Those wishing to see the future may wish to cut open an apple horizontally. The seeds inside form a pentagram and in the whorls of flesh around them can be read symbols of your fortune. The Harvest Moon, the full Moon closest to the equinox, is considered by some to be especially powerful.

"The whole year ahead might depend on your luck at this time"



The equinox occurs when day and night both last 12 hours and the sun rises exactly in the east and sets in the west

Image source: Sebastian Münster

Sonn alle halbe Jar von einem euſſeren Circkel kompt zu dem andern/vnd in jrer bew
mer ſtill ſteht/ſondern alle Tag ein newer Circkel vnd Parallel/vmb das Erdrich beſch
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Tagen. Dann wo zwo Stett ligen vnder einem Parallel/ſo ſeind alle Tag vnd Näch
gantz Jargleich an denſelbigen örtern. Exempel/Wie die Statt Mentz am Rheinſtr
den lengſten Sommertag 16. Stund/vnd den kürtzeſten Wintertag acht Stund/alſ

Suitable spells

This equinox is when the darkness returns and the nights really begin to get longer. That doesn't mean that you should be practising black magic! Spells that invoke the returning dark in a positive way include healing blessings that involve sleep and rest, and nurturing protection spells that centre around the home and the people in it. Mabon is a good time to invoke the calmness and stillness of a peaceful night. It's also the second harvest festival of the year, so working with bread, grains and seasonal fruits is appropriate. It's a good time for spells that involve wishes, too.

Long recognised in the ancient world as a special day, the autumnal equinox is still celebrated by Pagans today at spiritually potent sites

Image source: Getty

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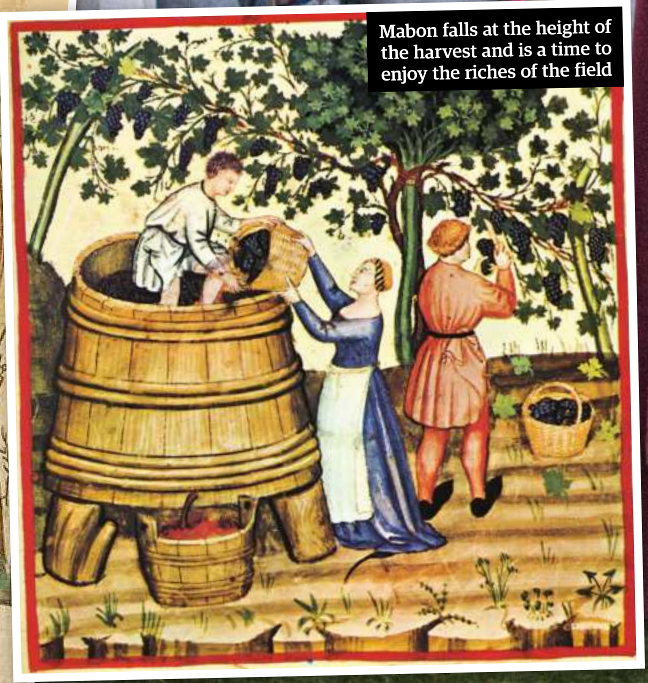


Mabon falls at the height of the harvest and is a time to enjoy the riches of the field

Samhain brings Pagans together to celebrate life and death as they remember those who have passed on

SAMHAIN

Halloween may have largely replaced it, but Samhain is still one of the most important festivals in the Pagan year

Written by Ben Gazur

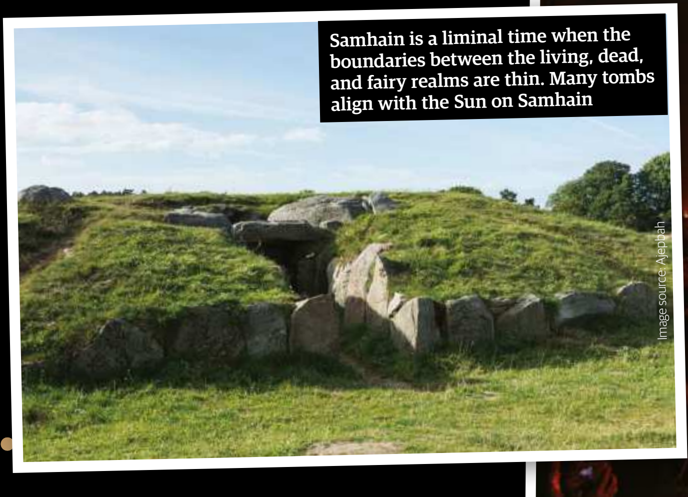
Samhain, falling on 31 October, is the last of the three harvest festivals for Pagans. It also marks the true beginning of winter and was seen as a day of the dead. Several Neolithic tombs were constructed in such a way that the light of sunrise on Samhain would illuminate the interior. The Christian Allhallowtide held on the same day may preserve this association with the dead, as its ringing of church bells is thought to provide comfort to the departed.

The early descriptions of Samhain in Irish literature show it as a time to end farming and warfare and to gather families and tribes together to survive the winter. In the cold nights there was much drinking and tale-telling to pass the time. Samhain itself was a time of potential danger, as the fairies would open their mounds and it was possible for the dead to return from the spirit realm. Samhain was the time when cattle and other livestock were slaughtered and preserved for winter and it may have been a time that was associated with sacrifices.

On Samhain the fire in the hearth was allowed to burn out while people worked in the fields. That night bonfires were lit to ward off evil and fire was taken from these to relight the home fires. The smoke from the great fires was thought to be protective. Sometimes two fires were lit and villagers and livestock would pass between them.

Today bonfires are still lit at Samhain. Major cities such as Edinburgh see large processions of people carrying flaming torches alongside drums and music. Traditionally the festivities of Samhain could be accompanied by dressing up and disguise. Boys would sometimes go from house to house to beg wood to be added to the communal fire. To light the way revellers carved lanterns from turnips and wurzels. It is easy to see how Samhain influenced the later traditions of Halloween, which many people celebrate today.

For modern Pagans, Samhain is both a time to remember the dead and to celebrate. Feasts are often held as a way of offering hospitality to the deceased. You may want to bake a batch of soul cakes to offer to the poor. It is also a time to introduce newborns to the community. Samhain can be the proper moment to reflect on things that have ended in the past year, as well as the hopes for what may come in the next.



Samhain is a liminal time when the boundaries between the living, dead, and fairy realms are thin. Many tombs align with the Sun on Samhain

Image source: Ajepbah

Image source: Getty

Fire and mummery has long been a part of celebrating Samhain; early pagans dressed as animals and spirits

Suitable spells

Samhain, or Halloween, is the night when the borders between this world and the spirit world are at their thinnest. Thus, it's the perfect time for adding a little extra energy to your divination spells. As the old Celtic New Year it's also excellent for spells of renewal: healing spells for those struggling with a long-term or chronic illness, or blessings that help to replenish energy or funds. Spells for luck and fortune are particularly potent at this time, as are candle magic and other types of fire spells. Traditionally, Samhain was one of the two times of year when hearthfires were completely put out and then re-lit (the other festival where this is done is Beltane).

> The boundaries between the human world and the otherworld are thought to grow thin at Samhain

Image source: Getty

Practise

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94 Casting a circle
96 Spells for luck and fortune
98 Spell for increasing wealth
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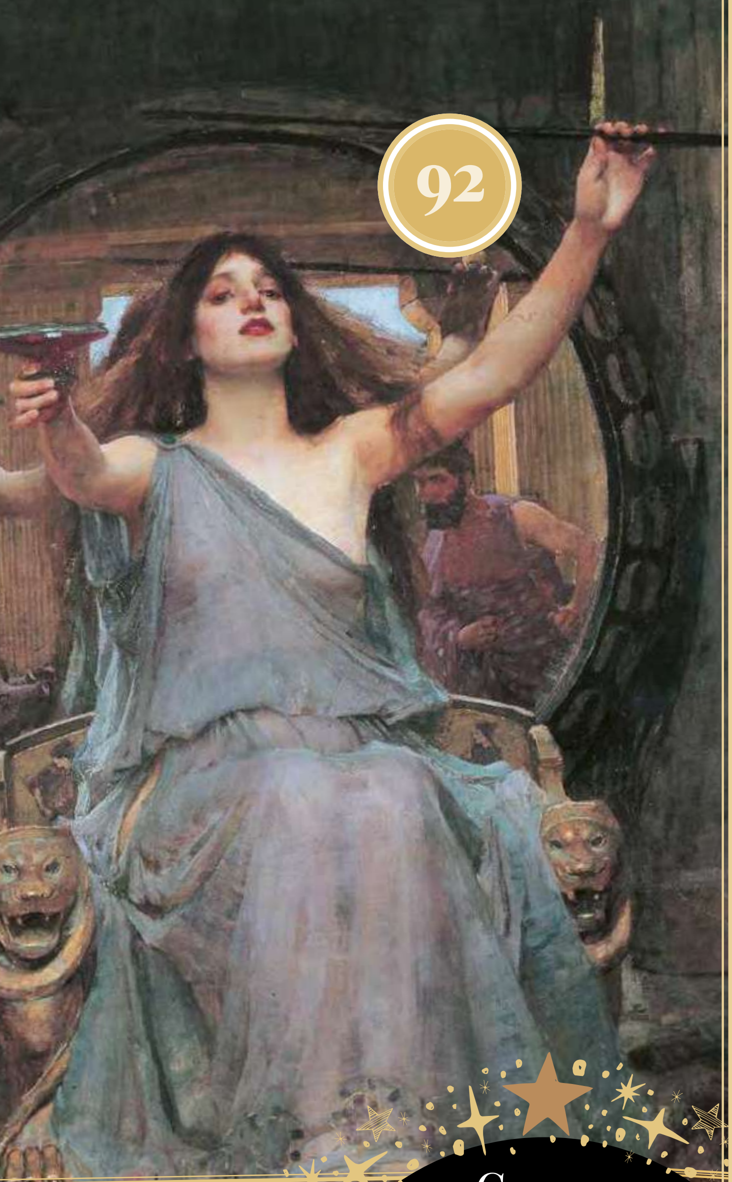

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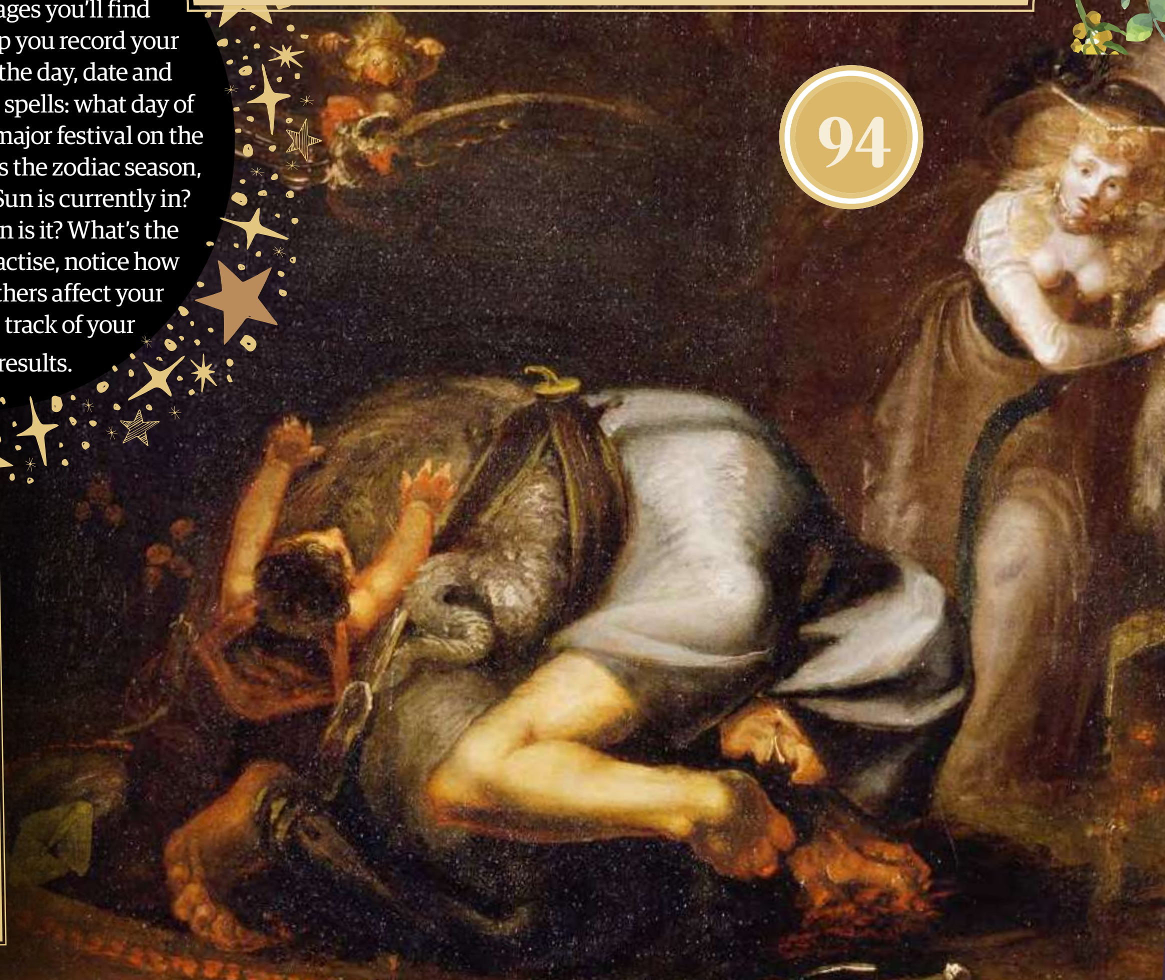
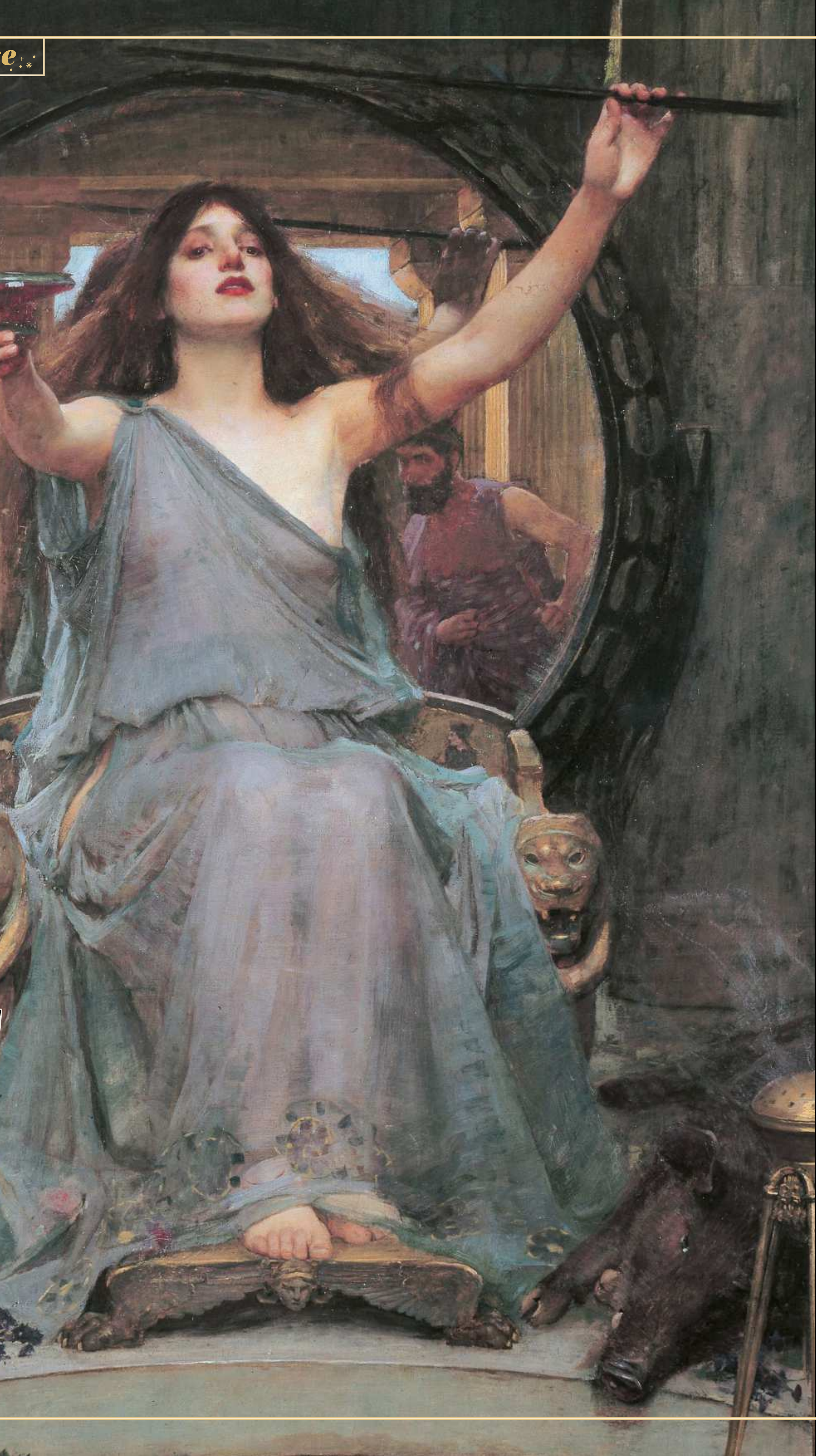
CASTING SPELLS

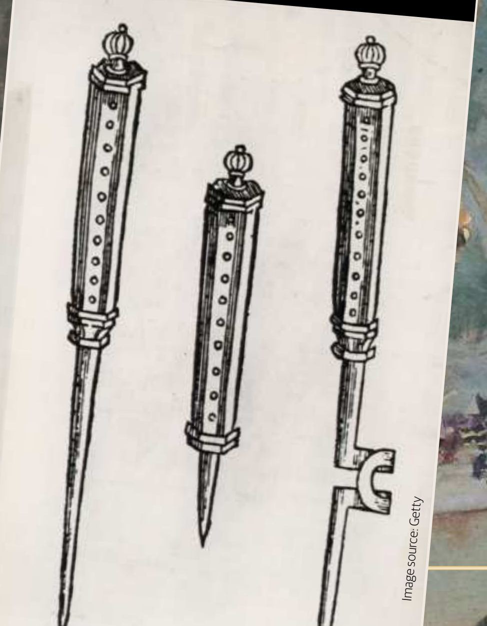
Throughout these pages you'll find journalling areas to help you record your progress. Think about the day, date and time when you cast your spells: what day of the week is it? Is it near a major festival on the Wheel of the Year? What is the zodiac season, ie, the star sign that the Sun is currently in? What phase of the Moon is it? What's the weather like? As you practise, notice how these elements and others affect your spellcraft and keep track of your feelings and results.





The goddess of magic Circe lifts her magic wand in this painting by John William Waterhouse, titled *Circe Offering the Cup to Ulysses* (1891)

Image source: Wiki/ John William Waterhouse



The athame is a powerful magical tool and is used to direct energy for the casting of magic circles and controlling spirits, among other things

Image source: Getty

WITCHCRAFT'S MOST MAGICAL TOOLS

Though witchcraft only requires salt, water and a couple of candles, some magic practitioners like to make the most of magical tools...

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

Harry Potter's adventures at Hogwarts might seem a bit far-fetched, but his curriculum isn't actually that far from the truth. The supply list included with his acceptance letter – which consists of a cauldron, text books, robes, a wand and more – is fairly accurate when it comes to magical equipment used by real-life witches and magic practitioners. Some witches use nothing but salt, water and a candle, but others like to go all out with the magical equipment. Different tools work better for different people, so it's good to experiment to find which are right for you.

Though some Wiccan witches prefer to do magic with their hands, others like to involve a wand. Wands can be made from practically any material, with wood, metal and rock being popular choices, and some are even set with gemstones and crystals. In Gardnerian Wicca, the wand is symbolic of the element of air, while other traditions see it as symbolising fire.

> Find the right tools for you. Not everybody likes using wands or athames, and that's fine – it's more important to be comfortable

Swords or ritual knives – commonly referred to as the athame – are often used in Wiccan rituals. A very magical object, the athame is used to direct energy for the casting of magic circles, the controlling of spirits and other ritual purposes. The athame traditionally sports a black handle which is usually inscribed, sometimes in the Theban alphabet. In his *Book of Shadows*, Gardnerian Wicca founder Gerald Gardner described it as "the true witch's weapon". However, this claim was later criticised by prominent Wiccan Frederic Lamond, who believed there should be no weapons in Wicca.

Almost all fairytale witches possess a cauldron of some sort, and many real-life witches are no different. In Wicca, the cauldron represents the womb of the Goddess and is often used to burn incense, make brews like oils, and to hold wide-pillar candles. A fire is normally lit within, and witches leap over the flames as a simple fertility rite or at the end of a handfasting. When filled with water, cauldrons are also regularly used for scrying, the practice of looking into a medium to detect messages or visions like prophecies and revelations.

When picturing witchcraft, many people think of the symbol of the pentagram, which often adorns Wiccan jewellery. The pentagram can also be found engraved into the Pentacle or Paten disc, an altar consecration tool. The disc symbolises the element of earth during evocation, and is a symbol that blesses items as well as magically energises anything that is placed upon it.

Image source: Getty

CASTING A CIRCLE

Before making the magic happen, many magic practitioners protect themselves by creating a sacred space known as a magic circle...

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

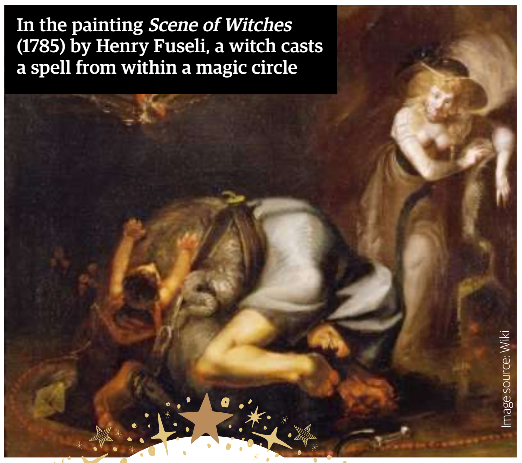
Though many books and films depict witches hitching up their sleeves and waving a wand to make the magic happen, a lot of preparation goes into performing a spell. Before anything, many witches and other practitioners of ritual magic start by casting a circle around themselves to create a magical space in which to work. It is believed that the energy within a magic circle forms a sacred space and provides magical protection. A magic circle is a mobile temple apart from the ordinary world, where magical things can occur far more easily.

In the early days of witchcraft and paganism, circles were traditionally believed to form a protective barrier between the spell caster and what they intended to summon. In modern times, magical practitioners generally cast circles in order to contain and concentrate the energy they raise during their rituals.

There are several ways to cast a circle, with different groups of individuals maintaining their own methods. It's vital that the caster has everything they need for the spell with them in the circle area before they begin; passing through the fragile barriers of the circle (referred to as 'breaking the barrier') can weaken or dispel it. Some witches and magical practitioners prefer to mark out a physical circle, with salt, water, chalk, cord and candles all being popular markers. Some incorporate elaborate patterns found in grimoires and magical manuals, while others keep things simple with an unadorned ring. Other magical practitioners prefer simply to visualise the circle.

No matter how the circle is drawn, four equidistant points are always marked out around its circumference. These points represent a number of things, including the four cardinal directions (north, east, south and west), the four elements (air, fire, water and earth), and the seasonal calendar. If the circle has been physically drawn, the points are often marked using coloured candles.

Other tools aren't necessary when casting a circle, but many magical practitioners like to use wands, swords, staffs and more when casting. Compasses (or, more recently, apps) also come in useful, as they help the caster determine where north is to begin drawing the circle. Should the practitioner need to leave the circle after casting it, a door must be cut into the circle's energy (usually on the east side) using whatever was used to cast it. Upon exiting, the circle is closed behind them by reconnecting the lines. Circles must be broken and dispelled at the end of a rite.

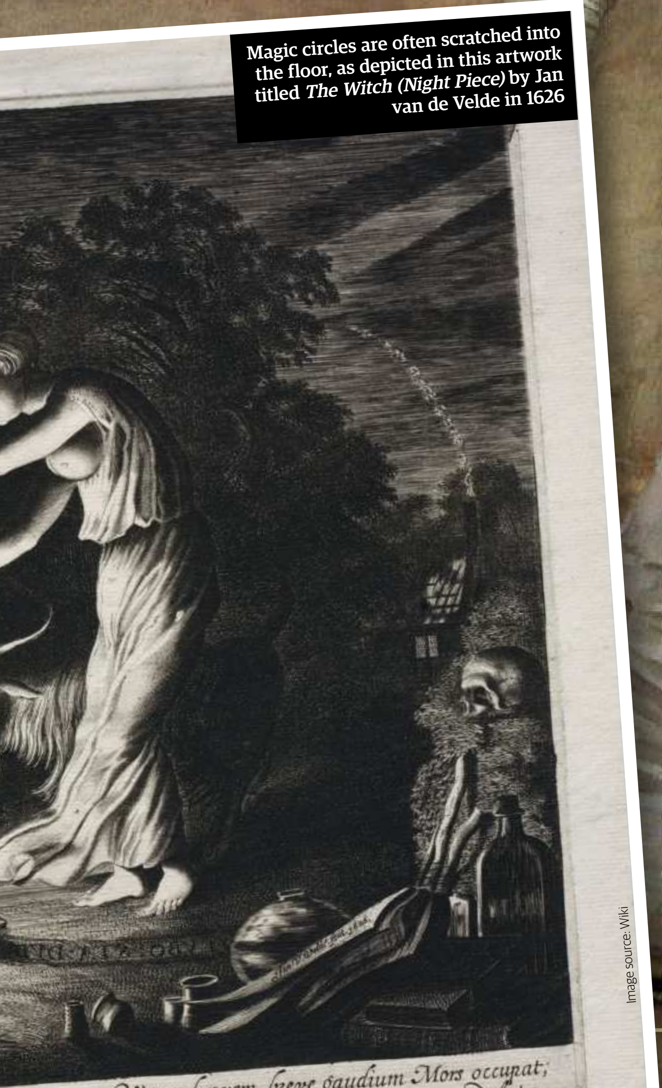


In the painting *Scene of Witches* (1785) by Henry Fuseli, a witch casts a spell from within a magic circle

Image source: Wiki

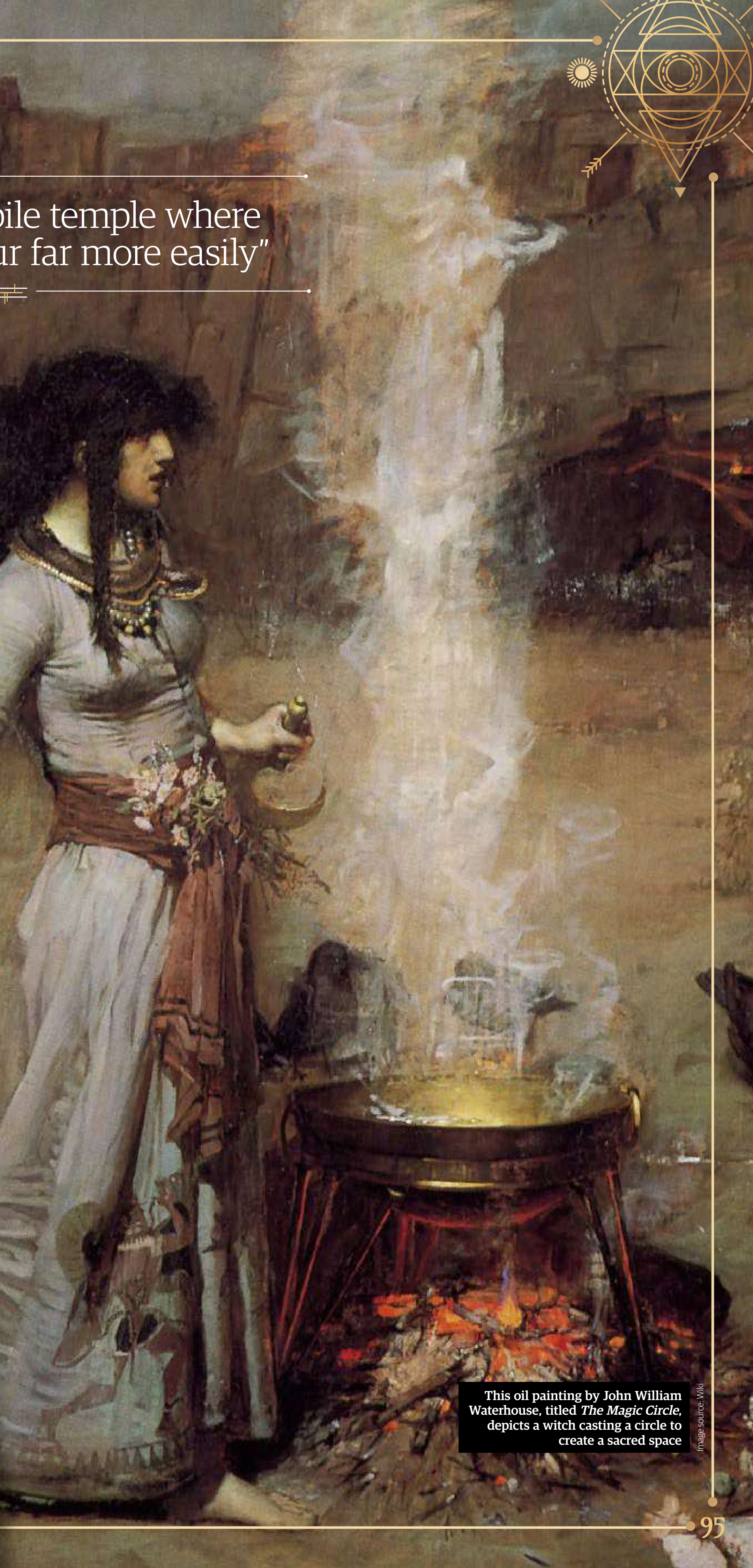
Circles should be cast clockwise ('sunwise') from the north and dispelled anticlockwise ('widdershins')

> "A magic circle is a mobile temple where magical things can occur far more easily"



Magic circles are often scratched into the floor, as depicted in this artwork titled *The Witch (Night Piece)* by Jan van de Velde in 1626

Image source: Wiki



This oil painting by John William Waterhouse, titled *The Magic Circle*, depicts a witch casting a circle to create a sacred space

Image source: Wiki

SPELLS FOR LUCK AND FORTUNE

We'd all like to be more successful in life, but despite the best efforts of the ancient sorcerers, it's not as simple as just summoning up gold…

Written by April Madden

Can you do a spell to make you rich? For many ancient practitioners, this was the holy grail of their art. Alchemists were fascinated by the possibility of turning ordinary metals into precious ones, and even had processes for making base metals, stones and glass look like gold, silver and gemstones (although their beautiful creations doggedly remained as simple costume jewellery no matter how much they charged for their skills). Whether a real spell for money went right, however, was solely a matter of luck.

It's much more appropriate to invoke good luck and fortune in magic than it is to demand riches. Always think beyond the merely material: spells are akin to prayers, and what we ask for reveals our true hearts and their intentions to the universe. You could ask for the gold at the end of the rainbow, and you might even get it, but do you really deserve it? Arguably not, if it's the first thing you think of doing with spellcraft. And will it truly make you happy, anyway?

The full Moon, Beltane and midsummer are among the luckiest times to cast spells for success and fortune

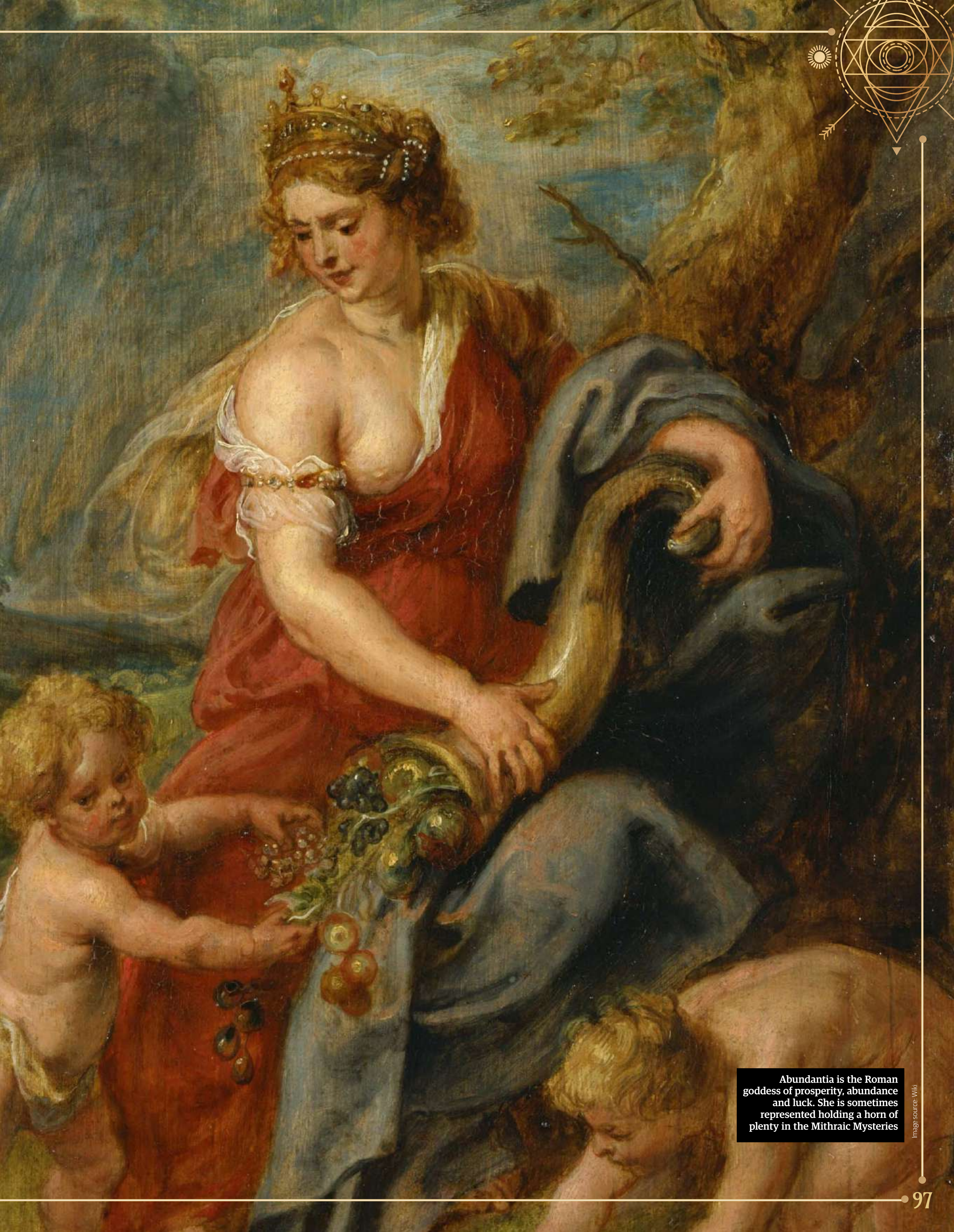
What's far more likely to make you, your loved ones, and the world around you happy is good luck, a much broader, more enriching concept than wealth alone. Luck has a lot of facets. To ask to be lucky with money is not the same as asking to have piles of the stuff: you're asking not for cold, hard cash but the much warmer possibility of comfort and fiscal stability. And luck goes far beyond financial considerations. Invoking luck and fortune in the context of an important exam or job interview demonstrates that you're prepared to work for what you want and provides context for the karmic boost you're requesting. Asking to generally be a bit luckier overall, meanwhile, covers everything from unexpected windfalls to managing to avoid a rain shower - anything you might say "Wow, that was lucky!" about.

In Wiccan philosophy it's considered best when doing spellcraft to ask for something for yourself, something for someone you know, and something for the world at large: you give before you expect to be given back, to demonstrate your worth and good intent. This has never been more true than in the context of spells for success and fortune. It really is true that you make your own luck…

"It's more appropriate to invoke good luck and fortune in magic than it is to demand riches"

West African goddess Mami Wata is believed to take her devotees on shamanic journeys through her underwater otherworld, from which they return luckier and more prone to good fortune

Image source: Sebastian Münster



Abundantia is the Roman goddess of prosperity, abundance and luck. She is sometimes represented holding a horn of plenty in the Mithraic Mysteries

Image source: Wiki

Spell for...

Increasing wealth

The colour green is very useful for attracting prosperity: wear green clothing, burn green candles, use green crystals

Written by Peg Aloi

You will need:

- **Green candle**
- Three coins
- **Pouch**
- Cinnamon
- **Bay leaf**

Many people dream of great riches, but this spell is aimed at increasing prosperity to assure stability. Money issues often cause feelings of stress and shame, and this spell also addresses these feelings. For this spell you need a green candle, three coins, a small pouch, some cinnamon, and one bay leaf. Gather your materials before you begin. Place the candle on your altar or a table, and light it. Pass each coin through the candle flame carefully, saying, "Light my way to prosperity" each time, and place the coin in the pouch, then add the cinnamon and bay leaf and tie it shut. Kiss the pouch three times, saying each time, "I have all I need." Place the pouch on your altar or other safe place, and meditate each day on the abundant blessings of your life.

> "Light my way to prosperity"

Is wealth just material? What else makes you feel prosperous? Meditate on these to enrich your life

Table symbols:

- ☀ Day of the week
- 🕒 Time
- ☾ Moon phase
- ✶ Zodiac season
- 🌧 Weather
- 🪶 Notes

Try your spell multiple times and record your feelings and results

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Spell for...

Luck and confidence

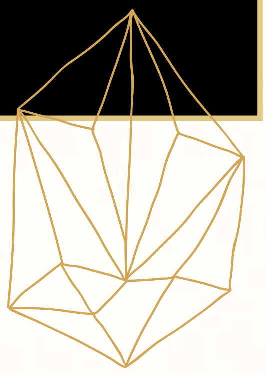
Green stones such as aventurine, malachite and tourmaline are well suited for spells to gain luck and prosperity

Written by Peg Aloi

You will need:

Small stone

One thing lucky people seem to have is the confidence that good things will happen to them. Think of Julie Andrews singing, "I have confidence in me!" in *The Sound of Music*. To bring good luck for a job interview, an audition, promotion, or exam, you want to radiate confidence both inside and out. Part of confidence is preparation, such as studying hard. For this spell, you will create a talisman to wear on your person. All you need is a small stone of your choosing, though any of the following crystals are especially well suited: malachite, labradorite, or green aventurine. Three days before your interview or exam, begin and end each day by saying to the stone, "I have the skills and confidence to succeed. I am prepared, and confident." Wear this stone in a pocket during your appointment.



> "I have the skills and confidence to succeed. I am prepared, and confident"

What makes you feel confident? Explore what helps, and use it as your lucky charm!

Try your spell multiple times and record your feelings and results

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Table symbols:

☀	Day of the week
🕒	Time
☾	Moon phase
★	Zodiac season
🌧	Weather
🪶	Notes

Spell for...

Success in life

Herbs, hope, light and self-care can all help to draw the energy of luck and success into our lives

Written by Peg Aloi

You will need:

Green candle

Herb/spice mix

Get a green seven day candle, and place on your altar or table. Make a mixture in a small bowl using at least three of the following: basil, mint, cinnamon, clove, ginger, poppy seeds, chamomile. Light the candle, place your fingertips in the bowl of herbs/spices, close your eyes and visualise yourself in an everyday situation, such as sitting at your desk, walking down the street, or getting ready for work. Imagine good things happening each day. Visualise your body bathed in green sparkling light that radiates to your surroundings. Rub your hands together, smelling the scent of the mixture on your fingertips. Do this each day for seven days, keeping the candle lit for one hour while you meditate on being open to success and new opportunities.

> "Visualise your body bathed in green sparkling light that radiates to your surroundings"

What good things would you like to happen in your life? Focus on them and call them to you

Table symbols:

- ☀ Day of the week
- 🕒 Time
- ☾ Moon phase
- ★ Zodiac season
- 🌧 Weather
- 🪶 Notes

Try your spell multiple times and record your feelings and results

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SPELLS FOR LOVE

Love magic is one of the most tempting practises, but it must be done with the right intentions

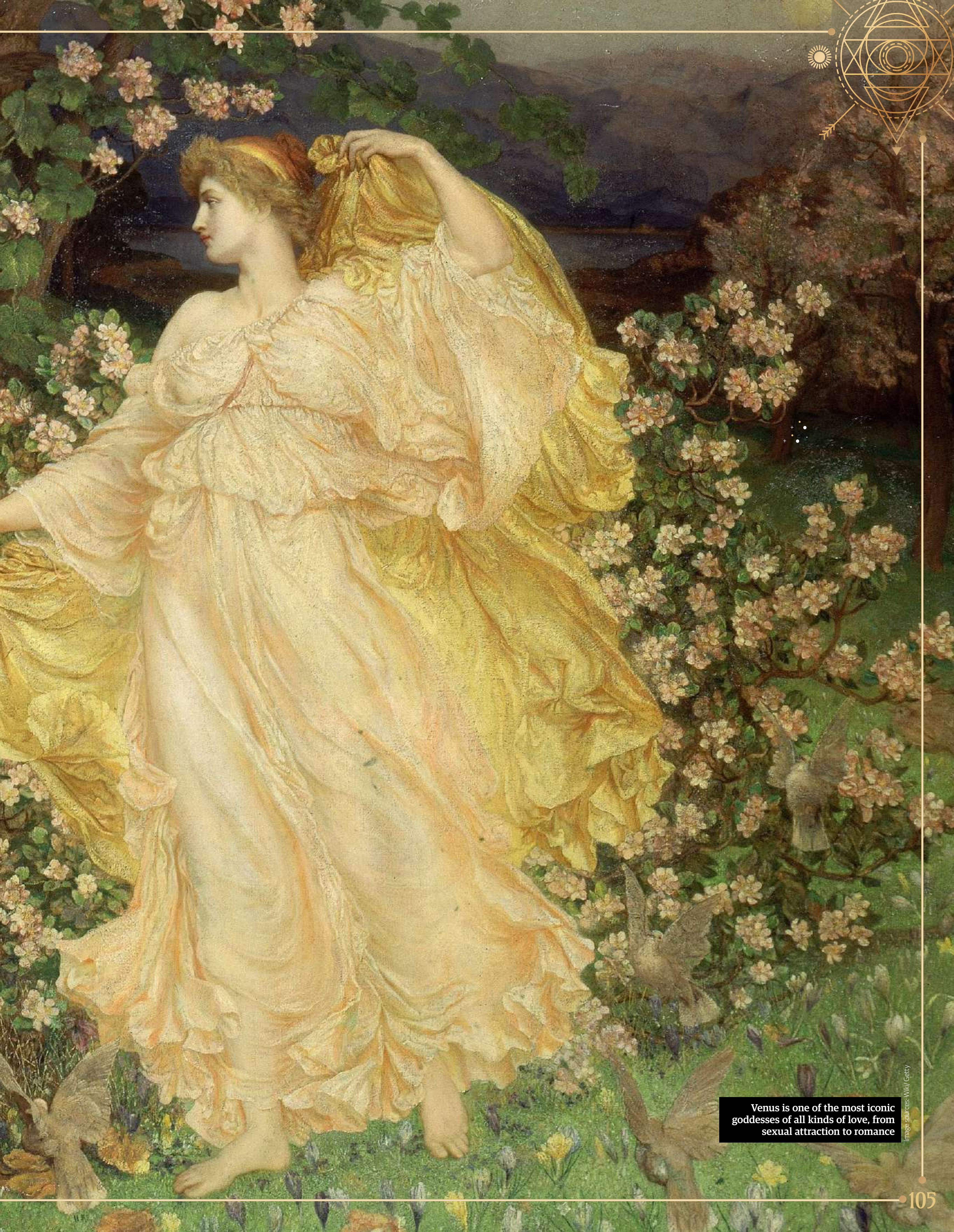
Written by April Madden

There's a scene in 1998 movie *Practical Magic* in which a female customer participates in a spell under the aegis of two sister witches, one of whom is unhappy with the proceedings while the other tells her to shut up and take the money. It's a bloody, distressing sequence, in which the woman stabs a tame dove through the chest with a needle while crying out, "I want him to want me so much he can't stand it!". There's a reason why it's portrayed so viscerally and horribly: it's black magic. Morally, you can't do a spell to make someone love you when they don't. And even if you could, why would you want to? Forced love is not true love.

Fridays are often the best days to perform love spells, as they're sacred to Venus, and to similar figures throughout world myth

For this reason, love spells can be controversial, but done correctly, with an open heart and the right intent, love magic is some of the gentlest and most beautiful you can ever perform, often working with appealing crystals like rose quartz, the loveliness of candle magic, and some of the most beguilingly scented or sweet tasting herbs, fruits and flowers. The key thing to remember is that love magic should never be about control or ownership, it's about attraction and affection. It's acceptable to cast a spell that makes you feel attractive if you're searching for a new partner; it's not to try to make yourself appear to be the most gorgeous person in the room at the expense of other people. It's okay to brew an enchanted aphrodisiac potion for yourself and your long-term partner to enjoy on date night (provided that they're okay with it, that is, and you're using food-safe ingredients); it's not okay to try and seduce someone new with it, especially if you don't tell them what it is. It's fine to be single and ask the universe for a new lover; it's not fine to specify that they should be the object of your unrequited crush, be that a celebrity or someone from your social circle - at best it won't work, at worst it might, but then you'll always wonder if they ever really wanted you in the first place. True love is about emotional warmth, gentleness and respect, and so is the magic that goes with it. Doing anything else will simply make you and the object of your affections miserable. Love spells should be performed in the same way as a gesture of affection - with honesty, honour, and care for everyone involved.

> "Morally, you can't do a spell to make someone love you when they don't"



Venus is one of the most iconic goddesses of all kinds of love, from sexual attraction to romance

Image sources: Wiki/ Getty

Spell for...

Walking in beauty

Enhance your powers of attraction by calling on the goddess of beauty to help you manifest self-love

Written by Peg Aloi

You will need:

White candles

Glass votive holders

Coloured squares of paper or fabric

Scarf

The goddess Aphrodite/Venus is associated with many aspects of love, including beauty and attraction. Anyone can use this spell regardless of gender identity or relationship status, as it is designed to manifest self-love. Begin this spell on a Friday. First, you need three white candles in glass votive holders, and coloured squares of paper or fabric to place beneath them: pink, pale green and pale blue. Arrange these on your altar. Now you need a scarf or piece of fabric large enough to drape over your shoulders, in one of these colours (or a combination of all three). Light the candles, then drape the fabric over your shoulders. Turn around three times, saying each time, "I walk in love and beauty. I attract love and goodness." Hang the shawl where you'll see it every day. Look at the candles and let the colours of Aphrodite remind you of the love all around you and within you. Repeat this spell daily for seven days and any time you feel the need to be gentle and loving with yourself.

"I walk in love
and beauty.
I attract love
and goodness"

What makes you feel attractive? Make use of the colours, scents and clothes that make you feel good!

Table symbols:

☀ Day of the week

🕒 Time

☾ Moon phase

✦ Zodiac season

🌧 Weather

✒ Notes

Try your spell multiple times and record your feelings and results

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Spell for...

Blessing a new relationship

Planting seeds is a powerful symbolic and physical act of magic

Written by Peg Aloi

You will need:

Bowl of soil

Seeds

Votive candle

The planet Venus rules the realm of all partnerships: love, domestic, business, creative. If you want to give extra support to the beginning of a new partnership, try this spell. You will need a small bowl of soil, some flower or vegetable seeds, and a small votive candle. At the new Moon, gather your materials. Light the candle, and plant the seeds in the soil. Pass the candle over the top, saying, "Warmed by Sun, may our union grow strong." Pour some water over the seeds, saying, "Soothed by rain, may our union live long." Repeat this once a week. Though this is a symbolic spell, if your seeds begin to sprout, plant them in a pot or outdoors and continue to nurture their growth.

> "Warmed by sun, may our union grow strong"

What lifts your heart and makes you feel loving?
Focus on this and manifest this loving energy outwards

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Table symbols:

☀ Day of the week

🕒 Time

☾ Moon phase

★ Zodiac season

🌧 Weather

🪶 Notes

Try your spell multiple times and record your feelings and results

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Spell for...

Success in a continuing relationship

Cakes and wine are often used to seal intent in a magic spell; virtually any combination of food and drink can be used

Written by Peg Aloi

You will need:

Glass of wine

Cake or biscuit

All relationships need a boost from time to time. Magic is no substitute for counselling or mediation, but you can imbue your solid relationship with extra positivity. For this spell you will need a glass of wine (or juice), and one small cake or biscuit. Place these items on your altar or table. Lifting the cake, say, "Grain of the fields, nourish our partnership" and then take a bite. Then lift the glass and say, "Fruits of the vine, celebrate our relationship" and take a drink. Holding the cake and wine, say, "Cakes and wine, mine and thine, may our union grow with time." If desired, invite your partner to join you and say these words aloud to one another.

"Cakes and wine,
mine and thine,
may our union
grow with time"

What makes you feel nurtured? Project this energy outward and encompass your partner in its light

Table symbols:

- ☀ Day of the week
- 🕒 Time
- ☾ Moon phase
- ★ Zodiac season
- 🌧 Weather
- ✒ Notes

Try your spell multiple times and record your feelings and results

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HEALTH AND HEALING SPELLS

Give yourself – and the world around you – a healing boost, but remember the importance of mainstream medicine too

Written by April Madden

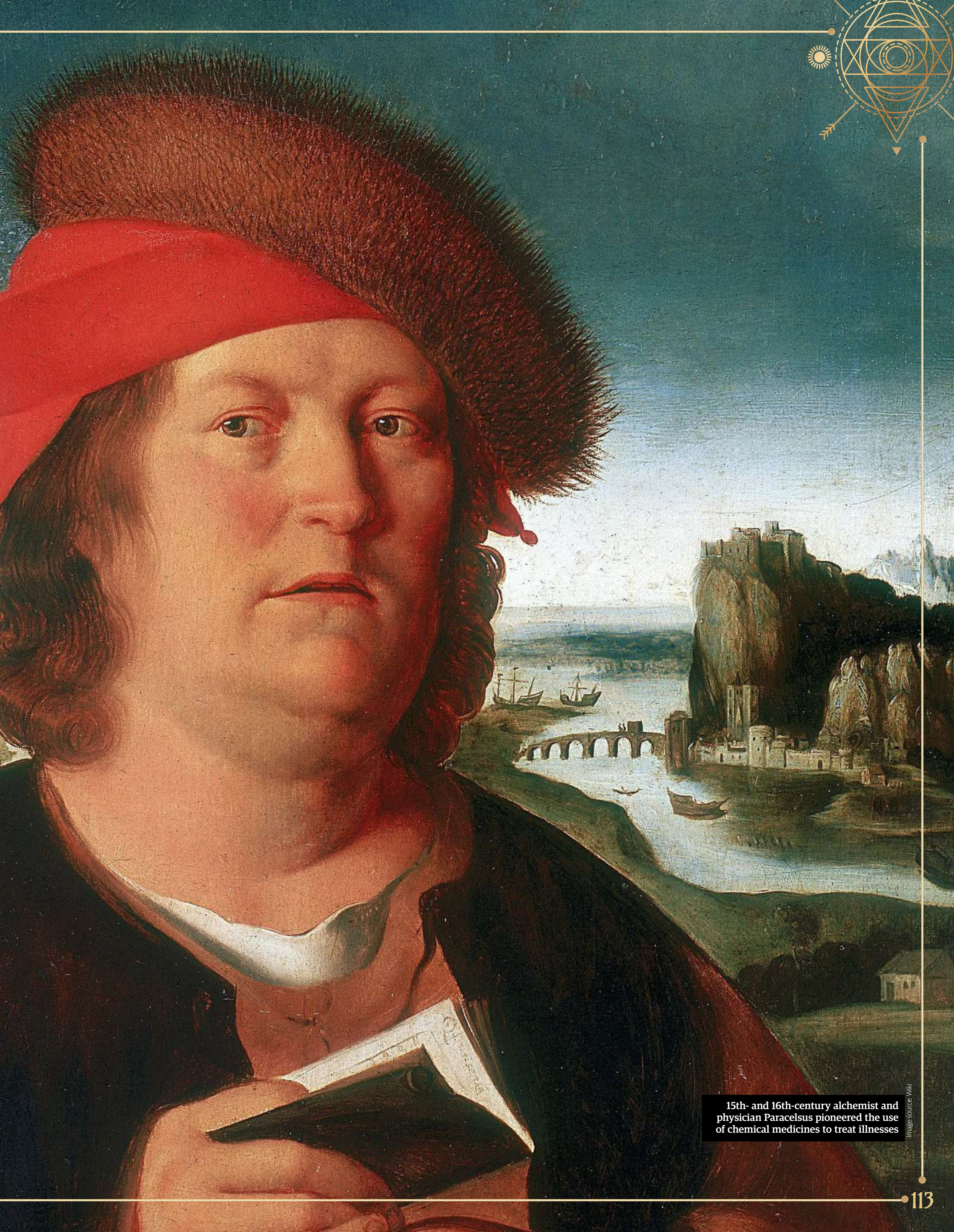
Spellcraft is no substitute for medical science. Our ancestors around the world did not spend centuries in experimentation for their legacy of discovery to be ignored. The history of pharmacology and chemical medicine in particular owes much to magical and alchemical ideas, as does vaccination – without the theory that these practices might work, ancient, medieval and early modern healers would never have taken a chance on them. Without their knowledge of herbal medicine and chemical reactions, we would not have developed many of the vital medicines that are used today. In the face of a serious physical or mental illness, then, you should not be consulting a spellworker, but a medically qualified healthcare professional.

Traditionally, many practitioners of spellcraft throughout history have been healers, midwives, and alchemists

Where healing spells can come in handy is in terms of maintaining good physical health – rituals are a remarkably effective way of making us do certain things, like remembering to exercise, hydrate, sleep, eat a balanced diet and ensure we're getting the right vitamins and minerals. They can also be soothing when dealing with minor ailments like coughs and colds (the placebo effect alone means a cup of enchanted lemon and honey or herb tea will always feel more soothing than a mundane one). Meditative and spiritual/physical practices like yoga, PSM and tai chi can help make us feel like our metaphysical energy is flowing smoothly, calming our minds as well as helping us to stay strong and limber.

Healing spells are not just for people, though (Take your pets to the vet, however; they are as entitled to medical attention as you are). Millions of people around the world suffer from the crippling effects of poverty or deal with terrible symptoms from treatable diseases. Spellcraft is a holistic practice: when asking for healing for ourselves or a loved one, it behooves us to view that in the context of a wider world, one that also needs healing, and pour our energies outward too. Some spellcasters believe that it's difficult, if not impossible, to cast a healing spell on yourself – they assert that your energies have enough to do fuelling your immune system without being called on in an already weakened state to hurry the healing process along. For this reason, it's best to start with the spells for maintaining good health and for healing the Earth.

"Rituals are a remarkably effective way of making us do certain things"



15th- and 16th-century alchemist and physician Paracelsus pioneered the use of chemical medicines to treat illnesses

Image source: Wiki

Spell for…

Maintaining good health

The pentagram at the centre of an apple is believed to correspond to the five elements, which are associated with functions of the human body

Written by Peg Aloi

You will need:

Pink votive candle

Apple

Doing a spell to envision health can help us listen to our bodies. For this spell, all you need is a pink votive candle and an apple. Start by lighting the candle. Then cut the apple in half crosswise, exposing the pentagram in the middle. Say, "By the power of the five elements, air, fire, water, earth and spirit, may my body be strong and vital, may my mind be clear and agile, may my spirit be whole." You may then eat the apple. Repeat this ritual daily for five days, and each day meditate on one of the elements as it relates to your body: air (lungs, breath); fire (heart, digestion); water (blood, kidneys); earth (muscles, nutrients); spirit (beliefs, emotions). Consider how to keep these elements balanced and healthy.

> "May my body be strong and vital, may my mind be clear and agile"

Centring yourself is important for good all-round health. What makes you feel healthy and calm?

Try your spell multiple times and record your feelings and results

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Table symbols:

☀	Day of the week
🕒	Time
☾	Moon phase
★	Zodiac season
🌧	Weather
🪶	Notes

Spell for...

Healing a mild ailment

This spell uses simple items (a candle and a cup of herbal tea) to rejuvenate your healthy habits

Written by Peg Aloi

You will need:

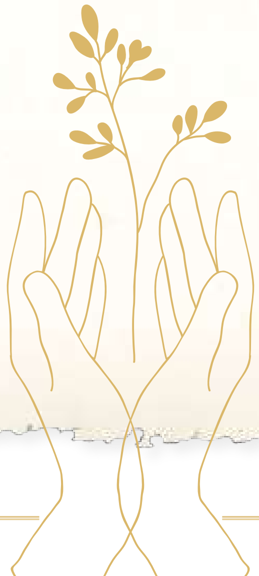
White votive candle

Cup of herbal tea

Mirror

Magical spells are no substitute for medical care. But sometimes the mental boost can help us to turn a corner or find some relief. This is especially true if our ailment is stress-related, which can affect sleep, digestion and immune system function. For this spell you will need a mirror, a cup of your favourite herbal tea, and a white votive candle. Light the candle, and stand or sit comfortably. Look into the mirror and say three times, "I am whole and healthy. I practise healthy habits. I care about my health." In the coming days, add one healthy habit each day to your routine (such as practising good sleep hygiene, drinking herbal tea, washing your hands frequently, getting some extra fresh air, or eating healthy foods).

> "I am whole and healthy. I practise healthy habits"



What helps you to heal when you're feeling under the weather? Embrace comforting routines

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Table symbols:

☀ Day of the week

🕒 Time

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✦ Zodiac season

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Try your spell multiple times and record your feelings and results

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Spell for…

Healing the Earth

We're all connected to the Earth; this spell helps us remember that and inspires us to do our part

Written by Peg Aloi

You will need:

A fine day

An outdoor space

The world's environmental and political problems seem insurmountable sometimes. But prayer, activism and magic all play a part in inspiring people to make positive changes and to work together. For this spell you need only yourself. Stand or sit outside, where your feet can be in contact with the ground (You may want to have bare feet). Close your eyes, and visualise your feet connecting to the Earth. Feel the unbroken connection of your body to the Earth, as if your feet are the roots of a tree, reaching deep down into the soil. Draw up the Earth's energy into your body, feeling its solidity and strength and ancient wisdom, stretching into the tips of your fingers and the top of your head. Do this as often as possible, asking for guidance to inspire your work to help the Earth, your community and the world.

> "Draw up the Earth's energy into your body, feeling its solidity"

Even the smallest effort can help to heal the Earth. What can you do in your daily life?

Table symbols:

☀ Day of the week
🕒 Time
☾ Moon phase
✶ Zodiac season
🌧 Weather
🪶 Notes

Try your spell multiple times and record your feelings and results

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SPELLS FOR PROTECTION

Safeguard yourself, your loved ones and your home with a bit of magical help

Written by April Madden

A common trope in fairy and folk tales is magical protection. This can take the form of an enchanted object, such as a hero's shield, or it can take the form of a space or place, like the mythical Isle of Avalon in Arthurian myth, sheltered from the outside world by walls of mist and illusion. There are even legends of guardian spirits – some Irish clans have stories of legendary spirit protectors, like the fairy woman Aiobhell who was thought to watch over the O'Brien family.

One of the first things that newcomers to magical practice are taught to do is to cast a circle of protection (see p94). Many traditions start by teaching the triple circle, offering beginners the security of three layers of magical protection. The triple circle is often seen as ringed in visualised light, water, and salt. When you're starting out with spellcraft it's important to feel safe and protected while you're meditating or conducting a ritual, which is why you cast three circles rather than one.

As well as ourselves, we also want to protect our loved ones. Amulets and talismans are a great way of doing this. They don't even have to look like magical objects: many crystals that are useful for protection spells, such as haematite, are available fairly cheaply as rings, bracelets and necklaces, so they can be worn unobtrusively.

Protective amulets don't have to look magical: they can be jewellery or even keyrings!

Safeguarding our homes is another important part of protection magic. As ever, it's not a substitute for basic security precautions, but a home protection ritual can be particularly reassuring for anyone who feels nervous or insecure, and the one on p126 has the added benefit of psychically cleansing a space too.

Salt is the most important tool you can use in a protection spell. It cleanses, absorbs negative energy, and forms barriers. Simple table salt is fine to use, but if you don't fancy scattering it around and then having to vacuum grains of it out of your carpets every few days, you could try growing your own salt crystals (all you need is table salt, distilled boiling water, a sterilised jar, a length of string, something to tie the string to so that it can dangle inside the jar, and some patience!) and putting them on windowsills, or consider purchasing a pretty Himalayan salt lamp and placing it as close as possible to the centre of your home.

"Salt is the most important tool you can use in a protection spell"

Image sources: Getty

Spell for…

Self protection

Haematite is a stone often used for grounding and feeling secure and safe

Written by Peg Aloi

You will need:

- **Pouch**
- Dried basil
- **Haematite crystal**
- Blue/black candle

Research shows that people who behave confidently are less likely to be victims of crime. Sometimes the way we hold ourselves can help us feel stronger and safer. This spell is also a charm of protection. You need a small pouch, some dried basil, a haematite crystal, and a dark blue or black candle. Light the candle and place the haematite and basil in the pouch. Draw the pouch closed, saying "I am safe, I practise safety and caution, I move through the world with awareness and courage." Wear this charm (in a pocket or on a cord around your neck) when out in public or in places you might feel unsafe. Feel yourself moving through the world with awareness of your surroundings and courage to deal with any problems that arise.

> "I am safe, I practise safety and caution, I move through the world with awareness and courage"

It can be unhealthy to focus on what makes us feel scared. What comforts you and makes you feel safe?

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Table symbols:

☀ Day of the week

🕒 Time

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Try your spell multiple times and record your feelings and results

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Spell for…

Protecting others

We all want to protect our nearest and dearest. This spell uses the amazing powers of salt to do so

Written by Peg Aloi

You will need:

- A photo of your loved one(s)
- Salt
- A white candle

This spell allows us to bless our loved ones and visualise their safety and well being. You will need a photo of the person/people in question, some salt, and a white candle. Place the photo on your altar. Put the candle in front of it, and light it. Pour a line of salt in a circle around the photo. Look at the photo of your loved ones. Picture the light of the candle surrounding them, bathing them in white protective light. Say, "Circle of earth, light of protection, keep them safe, day and night." You can do this once per day or as desired.

> "Circle of earth, light of protection, keep them safe, day and night"

Overprotection can be stressful. What can you do to make loved ones feel safe and empowered?

Table symbols:

- ☀ Day of the week
- 🕒 Time
- ☾ Moon phase
- ★ Zodiac season
- 🌧 Weather
- ✒ Notes

Try your spell multiple times and record your feelings and results

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Spell for…

Protecting the home

Rosemary has been used for centuries for cleansing and protection

Written by Peg Aloi

You will need:

- **Salt**
- Dried rosemary
- **Sprigs of rosemary**
- Small mirrors

If we don't feel safe in our home, our lives can feel very unstable. But remember, magic is no substitute for practical actions we can take, like getting advice from a trusted friend, or replacing door locks.

This spell surrounds your home with protective energy. You will need salt, dried rosemary, some sprigs of rosemary tied together, and some small mirrors. First, mix the salt and rosemary in a small bowl. Walk clockwise around your living area, placing a bit of the salt mixture into each corner, at the sides of each entrance, and below each window. At each corner or entrance, say "By the power of earth, I banish all negative entities from entering here." You will also take a small mirror (you can get these at craft stores) and place one facing upward at each window. With each mirror placement, say, "All negativity and evil, you cannot pass through the mirror." Leave a sprig of rosemary by each doorway.

> "By the power of earth, I banish all negative entities from entering here"

What makes your home feel safe and secure?
Channel its powers of protection

Table symbols:

- ☀ Day of the week
- 🕒 Time
- ☾ Moon phase
- ✦ Zodiac season
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Try your spell multiple times and record your feelings and results

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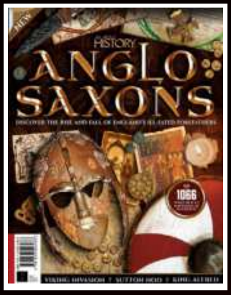
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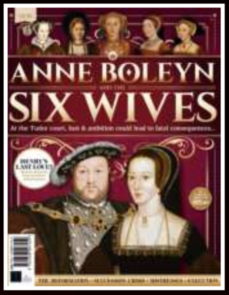
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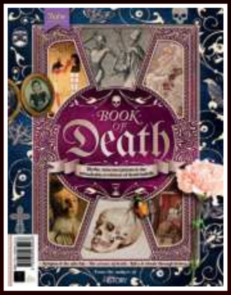
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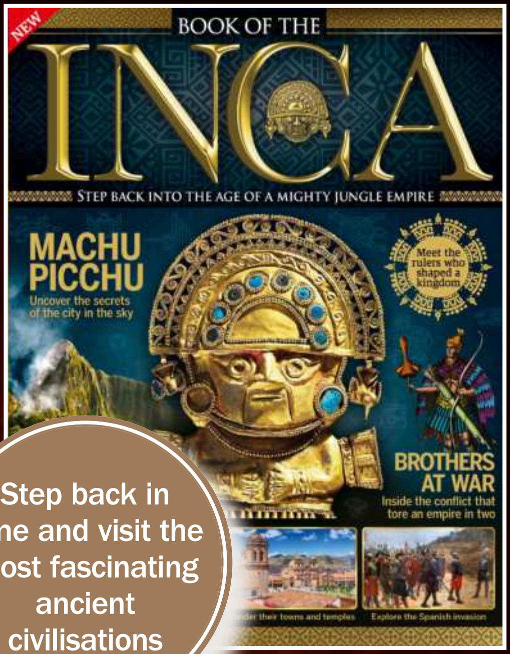
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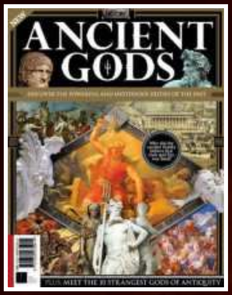
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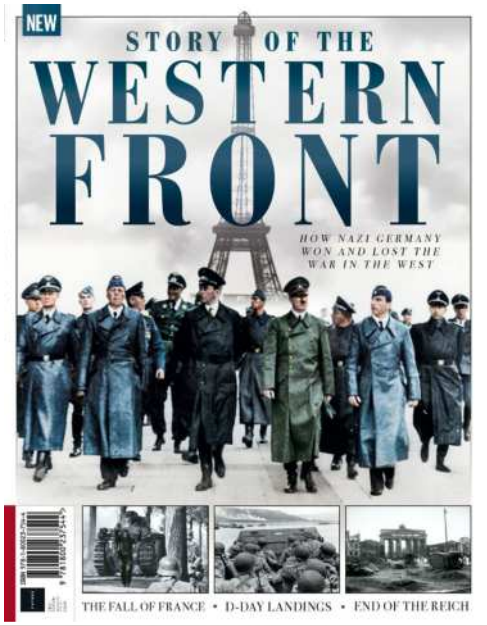
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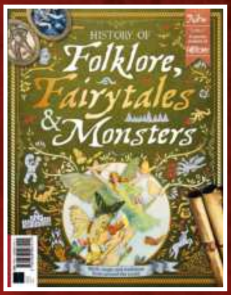
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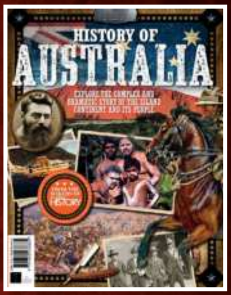
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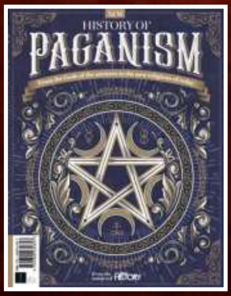
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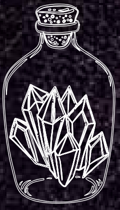

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